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## A BOMBURG BEAUTY.

A NOVEL.

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### CHAPTER XVI.

#### TOO MANY ADMIRERS.

'REALLY, this is a most delightful meeting!' said his lordship with the blandest of smiles.

The lady gave a slight inclination of the head and walked on. Her delight appeared less than Lord O'Banashee's. She was notorious for her good works, her strict moral code and high ideas of virtue. But she had met Lord O'Banashee at the charming town house which His Serene Highness Prince Friskovitch occupied during the season, and could not be positively rude to him, by pretending to ignore his existence altogether. Society imposes its penalties.

He, on his part, was quite conscious of the frigidity of her salutation, but that did not affect him. It was enough that other people should see he was on bowing terms with the ultra good and ultra proper Countess of London. It helped his morals to be seen lifting his hat to her, and showed that even she, with all her prudery and severity, did not dare give him the cold shoulder. He asked nothing more from this great lady than to be distantly recognised, being shrewd enough to realise that had he ventured to presume on her passive toleration he should most probably expose himself to a rebuff. But all this was nothing to Hetty, and his present object was to impress the girl with a sense of his importance. To fill her young mind with envy, with admiration

and astonishment at the number and exalted position of his acquaintances partook of the nature of a triumph. He did not disdain such paltry successes; they atoned for many a snub, for many a witticism made at his expense, of which he was fully conscious, but which it did not suit him to resent.

"That was the Countess of London," he explained patronizingly to the girl. "You have heard of her by repute of course?"

Again Hetty had the mortification of declaring her ignorance. She grew quite red with shame.

"The young lady with the Countess," resumed Lord O'Banashee, "was her daughter, Lady Betty Whitechurch, a most charming and elegant girl. She sings like an angel, and constantly performs at concerts in the East End, got up for the benefit of the poor. Her rendering of 'Home, sweet home,' brings tears to the eyes of the roughest navvies. Do you sing, Miss Davidson?"

"No, only a very little. My father and mother call it squalling, and do not like me to practise in the house."

"Ah! well, in your case accomplishments do not signify. If a woman has beauty she can snap her fingers at piano-playing and ballad singing and all that sort of thing. Not one man in a thousand cares for talent in comparison with good looks. A pretty woman has only to smile and look pleasant, for the opposite sex to consider her charming."

"I should like to be clever," sighed Hetty. "It is such a horrible sensation being stupid."

"My dear, you are better as you are. You are one of the fortunate minority who can afford to dispense with cleverness. Men will not like you any the less, but rather the more for not being a blue stocking. Ah! Princess, good morning. No, no, don't mention it. It was a mere trifle. I knew you liked flowers, and ordered my pet flower girl to keep you daily supplied. Pray, Madam, do not think of thanking me for so ordinary an act of courtesy."

Hetty looked up, and saw that Lord O'Banashee was addressing Her Royal Highness Princess Fustian, who had graciously paused to express her gratitude for the lovely roses which appeared every morning. Perhaps Hetty was in a censorious and cynical mood, but she could not help asking herself, if the Princess had been plain Mrs. Somebody, whether Lord O'Banashee's act of courtesy

would have appeared quite so ordinary in his eyes. She fancied not.

Thus they continued their walk, up and down the Promenade, stopping to exchange salutations with numerous members of the aristocracy. Lord O'Banashee succeeded in producing an impression upon Hetty. The poor child felt quite oppressed by the number of grand people he knew, and whom she didn't know, but apparently ought to know. Moreover the familiar way in which he talked of princes, dukes and duchesses possessed a kind of weird fascination for the simple country girl, who during her short life had never once rejoiced in the opportunity of meeting such august individuals. She realised that Lord O'Banashee moved in quite a different world from her own. And thus realising, certain dim stirrings of envy and of vague ambition arose within her breast. She too would have liked to have known Princess Fustian, Prince Friskovitch, and other exalted personages. A nod or a bow from them would at that moment have raised her in her own self-esteem and removed the crushing sense of inferiority that was beginning to steal over her. She grew quite downcast and subdued. Lord O'Banashee, however, perceiving that this pretty little nobody whom he had condescended to walk with, appeared properly impressed by the selectness of his social circle, kindly set to work to cheer her up by assuring her that he would lose no time in introducing her to a few persons of distinction—*Somebodies* not *Nobodies*, through whose means, and aided by his own benevolent exertions, she should rise to a higher level than the one she at present occupied. His promises on this score were somewhat vague, but very magnificent.

"I can do a lot for you, if you turn out to be a good, sensible girl," he said, looking at her with an expression which Hetty did not understand, but which made her flesh creep. "Only you must not be too prudish, or set your will up against mine."

"I'm sure I don't want to be too prudish," said poor Hetty, with the tears almost starting to her eyes.

"That's right, my dear, that's quite right. I've no doubt but what we shall get on excellently together. It would be a thousand pities for a pretty girl like you to stand in your own light. By-the-bye, do you see this ring I am wearing?"

And with a gesture, meant to express carelessness, he raised

his left hand, and showed Hetty what she considered a very ordinary plain gold band. "His Serene Highness, Prince Friskovitch, gave me that last year, in token of friendship. I value it excessively. If I had any children, I should leave it to my eldest son as a family heirloom."

"Are you not married, Lord O'Banashee?" she asked.

"I am in the very convenient position of a widower. The married ladies treat me with all the indulgency accorded to a bachelor, and the unmarried ones are good enough to consider that my short wedded life of little over a year, whilst affording proper experience, does not count against me. I had a boy"—was it fancy or did Hetty hear a sigh—"but he died. So now I am free to rove the world, and, like the bee in Doctor Watts' hymn, to gather honey from every passing flower."

"Don't you sometimes gather poison?" she inquired, innocently.

"Every flower is not sweet."

"Ha, ha! that's very good—very good indeed. You're getting on. At this rate you'll do nicely."

Hetty smiled, though she had not the least idea what she had said that was funny enough to elicit such praise.

"I'm glad you think I'm improving," she said. "It shows I'm not quite hopeless."

"Improving! You're making the most gigantic strides. That reminds me, I had a letter from Prince Friskovitch this morning. Would you like to see it? He's coming here next week as soon as Goodwood is over. It's wonderful how fond he is of our English institutions. He is much more like an Englishman than a foreigner, and shows his preference by more or less making London his headquarters. He writes a capital handwriting, doesn't he?" And so saying, with an air of pride and importance, which he was totally unable to conceal, Lord O'Banashee produced a note from the inner recesses of his breast pocket, which he opened and showed to Hetty, not allowing the precious document, however, out of his hand. It was, in fact, stock in trade to him, which he could not afford to lose. Hetty was not the only person who had seen and would see that letter. For many a month to come it was destined to be exhibited in a similarly casual manner. The only pity was that Lord O'Banashee sometimes made mistakes. Owing to a certain confusion of mind, or of loss of memory consequent on increasing old age, he



was apt to bring forth the same letter and show it repeatedly to the same people. The first production was attended with considerable curiosity, the second with indifference, the third with derision. If he had been more cautious in displaying the Prince's autograph, and not made it quite so cheap, the effect created would doubtless have been greater.

Hetty glanced at the letter. It was the first time she had seen it, and she made no effort to conceal her interest. Lord O'Banashee was gratified. These and such as these were his moments of reward for many a reverse.

"It would be a great thing for you, Miss Davidson, to get introduced to Prince Friskovitch," he said, eyeing his companion much as an audacious blackbird eyes a ripe peach. "And I'll tell you what I'll do, if you are a very *very* good girl, and show proper respect and attention to old age, as represented by me, I will see if I can manage it; yes," meditatively, as if wishing to make her fully aware of the magnitude of the promise, "I will see if I can manage it."

With this assurance, he ducked his grey-hatted head under Hetty's lace parasol, and kept it there so long that she began to wonder what possible attraction it could have for him, and to fear he must be subject to sunstroke.

Lord O'Banashee was very kind. Nothing could exceed his kindness and affability, but—she did not like him. She shrank instinctively from this comparative stranger, who flattered her so openly and coarsely, and whose declarations with regard to herself seemed to partake of the nature of bribes. If you do so and so, I'll do so and so. That was what his promises amounted to, when stripped of fine expressions and superfluous words. As previously stated, she was completely ignorant of the World of Fashion, but her maidenly reserve made her recoil from the fast, loose style of conversation affected by Lord O'Banashee. It jarred upon her delicacy, and prevented her from being at ease. She smiled and nodded, and exclaimed when she ought to, but her smiles and nods and exclamations did not come naturally. And human intercourse, when tinged by an element of constraint, is never altogether pleasant. It was quite a relief to Hetty when Lord Charles Mountgard suddenly accosted her.

"Here you are at last, Miss Davidson," he exclaimed, with a flush of pleasure dyeing his boyish face crimson. "I have been

looking for you everywhere, and began to fear you had played truant, and not come out at so early an hour after all. Good morning, my lord," giving Lord O'Banashee a cold nod, accompanied by a look of dislike.

Whereupon he carried Hetty off in the most unceremonious manner, leaving her elderly admirer intent on the pleasing and edifying occupation of spying out more Royalties and members of the Peerage.

"I didn't know you knew that fellow O'Banashee," said Lord Charles, directly they were out of hearing.

"Amelia introduced me to him this morning at the Wells," rejoined Hetty, innocently.

"Oh! did she? Milly is a good creature, none better; but I do wish she wouldn't be quite so officious."

"In what way?"

"Well, she has got a perfect mania for introducing everybody to everybody, and people do not always like it."

"In the present instance, I think you are rather unjust to Milly. She could not help herself. Lord O'Banashee asked for an introduction."

"Very likely. I can quite believe that. He has cheek enough for anything. But you may take my word for it, Miss Davidson, Lord O'Banashee's acquaintance is by no means desirable; especially for a beau—I mean a young girl like yourself."

"I know nothing about him," said Hetty, in reply. "He talked very strangely—at least, so I thought."

"Confound his impudence," exclaimed Lord Charles, whilst his face clouded over with displeasure, for youths are notoriously strict as regards the ladies they happen to fancy. "Take my advice, Miss Davidson, and for goodness' sake don't encourage Lord O'Banashee, even if your vanity is flattered by his attentions."

"You evidently give me credit for a large share of that commodity," said the girl, a little piqued.

"Indeed, no. You quite mistake me. May I speak plainly?"

"Yes, if you choose, though I don't quite see what I have done to incur a lecture."

"You have done nothing. Only, luckily for yourself, you are ignorant of the world."

"Ignorant of the world," she cried irritably. "Everybody

throws that in my face, just as if it were a fault. I suppose when I am a few years older, I shall be as wise as the rest of you."

"You are wise enough as it is. All I want to say is this: When a man, bearing Lord O'Banashee's reputation, chooses to flirt with fast married women given to sailing near the wind, that's nobody's affair but his and theirs; but by God! when he takes to trying the same game on with a young and innocent girl, and openly flatters her in order to turn her head, then I should like to knock him down."

"Why are you saying this to me?" inquired Hetty, with a shade of annoyance darkening her face. "Lord O'Banashee wished to make my acquaintance, he talked a great deal about lords and ladies, and I did not like him. That's an end to the matter."

Lord Charles' brow cleared.

"Oh! If you had the good sense not to like him, there's no particular reason for warning you against being too intimate."

"No reason whatever," she answered shortly. "May I ask why you entertain such a particular dislike to his lordship?"

"I despise any person who cringes and fawns to those in a higher position. Prince Friskovitch is a good chap—I have not a word to say against him, but the way O'Banashee sucks up to him is simply disgusting."

"No doubt others do the same," she observed drily, for she had not forgiven him yet for his interference.

He flushed scarlet.

"Oh, no doubt. Why don't you tell me to my face that you have a perfect right to choose your own company?"

"So I have," she retorted mischievously.

"All right; only I repeat that it does a girl no good to be seen with Lord O'Banashee. She may be as pure as gold, but people will talk. Surely you understand what I mean?" And he whacked savagely at the grass with his cane.

Hetty looked puzzled. "No," she said, "not quite."

"Well, then, I will put it in another way. Lord O'Banashee delights to get hold of a pretty girl—the prettier the better, and to make her conspicuous by attentions, which it is notorious no modest woman can receive."

"I—I didn't know," stammered Hetty, with a painful blush, feeling as if Lord Charles were taking her to task for some repre-

hensible lapse of conduct. "He asked me to walk, and my father went away and left me, and so—and so—" her voice beginning to lose its steadiness of intonation, "I said yes." And as she spoke, her eyes filled with tears.

Lord Charles checked his impetuous speech and gazed at her earnestly.

"Good gracious, Miss Davidson. What's the matter? Do you mean to say that I've been such a beast as to make you cry?"

"It's—it's nothing," she said faintly, putting her handkerchief up to her face, "only it all seems so bewildering. I—I don't know what I've done to—to put you out, or make you so angry. And as for Lord O'Banashee, I don't care a bit about him. He says odd things that m—make me feel uncomfortable."

Lord Charles could have bitten out his tongue. Until now, he had never fairly realised the extent of her innocence. Artless and unsophisticated as she was, she needed no warning. Her very ignorance rendered her safe against the fascinations of Lord O'Banashee, and men belonging to a similar class. Miss Dawkins would have understood him fast enough. Hetty did not. To her, the great black world of Fashion and Frivolity and Sin was all a blank—an unknown region into whose dark depths her pure spirit had never penetrated. The tears that still moistened her long, soft eyelashes were inexpressibly dear to him. This spoilt and petted favourite of fortune, born with a golden spoon in his mouth, and on that account run after by hundreds of match-making mothers and husband-hunting daughters, held them sacred.

"Come," he said gently, "let us talk of these things no more. I was wrong even to have mentioned them in your presence. We who live in the world, fancy that everyone must necessarily be worldly. I made a mistake, and at your expense, Miss Davidson. Will you forgive me?" And he looked at her penitently.

"There—is—no—nothing to forgive," said Hetty, with a little catch in her voice. "It's not my fault, but I—I am so stupid. When I hear Amelia and the people about me talking, as they do, I feel such miles and miles behind them."

"God bless you," he said reverently. "May you ever remain so. Believe me," and there was an unusually serious expression

on his young face, "you are better—infinately better as you are. If I had a sister or a daughter, I could not wish her different. Now, are you convinced?"

Hetty wiped her eyes surreptitiously. His words restored her self-esteem. He had frightened her by his vehemence, but he was nice all the same, if only he had not had red hair, a freckled complexion, a snub nose and sloping shoulders. She could not forgive these. But she liked him in a friendly, tranquil fashion that was restful and agreeable. They finished their walk together, and by the time Mr. Davidson returned to the well for his second glass of water, her composure was quite restored. Lord Charles was politeness itself. But even whilst he was making himself most pleasant, she was conscious of a certain want of attention on her part, which partook almost of ingratitude. Every now and then her eyes would wander amongst the moving throng of men and women, seeking for the tall, soldierly form of a young hero possessing flaxen hair and light blue eyes.

In vain, he was not there. His absence created a void—a sense of something wanting. She listened indifferently to Lord Charles' observations, and moved mechanically by his side. He thought she was still wounded by the remarks he had incautiously made, and did his utmost to restore her to gaiety. Ah! if he could have looked into her heart. He would have seen that it was full of a big German officer, whose image had made a distinct impression thereon, and that Hetty was suffering from a certain strange malady, known by the name of "Love at first sight."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### SWEETS TO THE SWEET.

ABOUT half-an-hour after Mr. and Mrs. Davidson and Hetty had finished breakfast, and were still sitting at their little square table in the garden, contemplating the remains of that meal, which, by-the-way, consisted only of coffee and rolls, a waiter appeared, bearing a large wire basket, filled with the most magnificent Marshal Niel roses and variegated leaves of a reddish-brown tint that harmonised admirably with the delicate colour of the lovely flowers. The immense size of the basket and the taste displayed in its arrangement rendered it quite a work of art.

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Hetty, rapturously. "I never saw more exquisite roses, even at home. I wonder who they can be for." And she looked round to take a comprehensive survey of the occupants of the garden.

Her curiosity was soon destined to be satisfied, for the waiter, carefully threading his way among the numerous tables, stopped before the one at which they were seated, and deposited his burden beside Mrs. Davidson, at the same time tendering a card; small, highly glazed and evidently belonging to a gentleman.<sup>1</sup>

"One of de flower-girls 'ave just called and left dis for you," he said.

"It must be a mistake," said Mrs. Davidson, addressing her husband and daughter rather than the man. "We know no one in Homburg to send us flowers, especially such flowers as these."

"Unless it be Amelia," suggested Hetty.

"Pooh! nonsense! She is not likely to spend her money on an old woman like me." So saying, Mrs. Davidson took up the card, that the waiter presented on a small, plated salver. At the first glance a look of surprise stole to her face, which was quickly succeeded by a flush of pleasure.

"That comes of making oneself agreeable," she exclaimed in accents of triumph. "I thought the young man was favourably impressed. Likings are generally mutual. If you take a fancy to a person it is nearly always reciprocated."

"In Heaven's name, who and what are you talking about?" inquired Mr. Davidson.

"It's very attentive of him, very attentive indeed," went on Mrs. Davidson, ignoring the interrogation. "And the first time we meet, I shall make a point of telling him how exceedingly touched and gratified I am by his most kind thought of me. If I were twenty or thirty years younger, I should stand in great danger of losing my heart to that young man. He's quite the gentleman—quite. Were I a girl now——" looking significantly at Hetty.

"I haven't the least idea who you mean," said Mr. Davidson, somewhat testily, for his curiosity was excited, though he did not care to let his wife see that such was the case. "Can't you speak plainly, instead of trying to make a ridiculous mystery of nothing at all?"

"Is it nothing at all?" she retorted, unable to conceal her

elation. "That shows how little you know. Do you call it nothing at all for me to be receiving bouquets like this from the son of a duke? because, if you do, I don't. In my opinion it is a very great compliment, and I haven't the least doubt in my own mind but what it was intended as such. As I have already observed, this comes of making an impression."

"Are you talking of Lord Charles Mountgard, by any chance?" queried Mr. Davidson, striving to gain possession of the card which his wife held tightly clasped in her right hand, and brandished aloft as if it were a banner.

"Ha, ha!" she simpered. "You've guessed at last, have you, though I must say you've been uncommonly slow in doing so. I suppose it never entered your head to imagine that whilst you and that Miss Dawkins went gadding off together yesterday afternoon to drink the waters, I was striking up a warm friendship with Lord Charles? Nevertheless such was the case. We soon found out that we were sympathetic to each other."

"I wish I could make the same agreeable discovery," muttered Mr. Davidson under his breath.. "I've tried now for a good many years, but failed signally in the attempt."

"What are you mumbling about, John? If you've got anything to say, speak out."

"I was listening to you, my dear. Please continue the narration of your conquest. You need not be afraid of me. I'm not jealous. I give you *carte blanche* to flirt as much as you choose. You have arrived at an age when you are not likely to inflict any deadly harm on the opposite sex."

"What a civil speech! But there, that's just the way husbands always talk, and that is the reason why, nine times out of ten, women find someone else so vastly more agreeable. Once married to a man, he does not even take the trouble to be decently polite. Thank goodness, however, others make up for the deficiency. Are you attending, John, to what I say?" And she turned sharply on her lord and master.

"My dear, I am vitally interested. I find your conversation even more sparkling and original than usual. No wonder Lord Charles fell a victim to your fascinations. The poor young fellow hadn't a chance, if you exercised them as freely upon him as upon me."

"There you go again with your horrible sarcasm. I declare I



can't stand it. It makes me mad to be jibed and sneered at in that cold, detestable way. My belief is that you are jealous, though, like all men, you pretend you are not. Is it my fault that Lord Charles likes me? Can I help it? I always told you what a happy knack I had of getting on with the right people, when only I had the chance. The snobbish, badly-bred folk are the ones who are so hard to talk to, and who give themselves airs. Now, with a duke's son I felt quite at home at once. I had not the smallest sensation of *mauvaise honte*"—she pronounced it "onty"—"the whole time we were together."

"That must have been exceedingly comforting," remarked Mr. Davidson, with a sly wink at Hetty.

"It was *most* comforting; for it proved conclusively that all I require is opportunity. Given the opportunity, and there is no reason why I should not become a lady of fashion. I'm a little old perhaps, but it's never too late to improve the social position of oneself and one's family. John," decidedly, "I shall do great things for you yet."

"I'm glad to hear it, my dear. Only it strikes me they have been rather long in coming."

"Because I have never had the chance. Now I see an opening and I'm on my mettle. But to go back to Lord Charles. It was very sweet and very nice of the young man to send me these lovely flowers," burying the tip of her nose in their midst, "but I can't bear the idea of the poor fellow spending his money upon me. It is true it shows a delightfully generous spirit, still I must not take undue advantage of it. In fact, John, I should like to make it up to him. We must consider in what way we can best show our appreciation of the honour he has done me."

Mr. Davidson laughed. There was something comical about his wife's inordinate vanity, and her assumption of the bouquet being due to her own and not her daughter's charms.

"Hetty," he said archly, "have you any idea what causes his lordship to be so singularly attentive to your mother?"

"Not the very slightest," she answered demurely. "The only way I can account for it is, that, as mamma says, he has taken a fancy to her," smiling at the oddity of the notion.

"That's it, that's it, no doubt," he rejoined, chuckling until he almost choked. "At the very respectable age of sixty, your mamma is still so youthful in manner, so charming and fascinating,

that a young man of twenty-two falls desperately in love with her. Ha, ha! It will be a long time before we get anything to beat that." And leaning back in his chair, Mr. Davidson gave himself over to free indulgence of the joke.

Mrs. Davidson bridled up. For her part she saw nothing so exquisitely funny in the matter. It might be unusual, but it was by no means without the pale of possibility.

"You're always poking fun at me," she said, with an indignant toss of the head, which made that curious erection of lace, muslin and brilliant ribbons, which she called her cap, topple on one side. "And no doubt you think yourself very clever, though that is a delusion shared by nobody else. But let me tell you this, Mr. Davidson. Though you don't appreciate me, and never did, other people do." And she crossed her hands on her lap with exceeding dignity.

"I'm delighted to hear their taste is so much better than mine, my dear."

"*Some people*," resumed Mrs. Davidson, with considerable emphasis, casting an eye of triumph on her flower-basket, "like my conversation. They find it amusing and to the point, and take pleasure in my society."

"What a merciful dispensation it is of Providence," he replied, "that in this world there should exist so much diversity of taste. Everything would be horribly same if we did not occasionally agree to differ."

"Tut, John," she rejoined pettishly, not altogether relishing her husband's badinage, and therefore adopting the feminine tactics of changing her ground. "That's just like you. You never can see facts as they are, but always endeavour to muddle them away by some curious process of reasoning of your own. It's a grave defect in anyone's character to possess that unfortunate kind of mental charlatanism. Now I shouldn't be the least surprised if you ended by arguing yourself into the belief that Lord Charles had never sent me these flowers at all."

"No, my dear Emma," he returned, "I don't go quite so far towards lunacy as you make out. I simply wish to remark that had you not been Hetty's mother, the chances are you would never have received them."

"Hetty, Hetty," she exclaimed irritably. "It's always Hetty

with you, and never a single thought for your wife. Am I really so very disagreeable that you can't conceive of a gentleman showing me an ordinary act of civility? or is it because you are so rude," she was beginning to lose her temper, "so overbearing and ill-bred, that you judge the rest of your sex by yourself?" And she waved her handkerchief hysterically before her face as if meditating tears on very slight further provocation.

"Come, come," he said, dropping the tone of banter that had occasioned so much indignation. "Don't excite yourself unnecessarily. Whether the flowers were meant for you or for Hetty is of no importance whatever. There they are, and my advice is, take them upstairs, and sprinkle them with water so that they should keep fresh as long as possible."

Mrs. Davidson, feeling the uselessness of continuing the discussion, and firmly convinced in her own mind for whom the bouquet was intended, rose from the table, bearing off her spoils. Hetty followed with dutiful alacrity.

When the ladies had retired, Mr. Davidson left the hotel on a little expedition of his own, which he saw no particular reason for divulging. He first wended his footsteps towards a florist's, where he bought the very best button-hole that could be purchased for money, and with slight persuasion prevailed upon the young lady in attendance—who, by-the-way, was rather a good-looking girl—to fix it securely in his coat. Thus adorned, he proceeded to walk down the street, until he came to Brah's, the confectioner's shop. Here, he did what was, for an elderly gentleman, a very funny thing. He stood and gazed with the absorption of a school-boy at the tempting sweets exhibited in glass dishes in the window. At length a placard informing the public that English was spoken within, caught his eye, and apparently gave him courage to enter the shop. The consciousness of being about to perform an action which was for him a most unusual one, imparted a certain hesitancy to his gait. He advanced with evident nervousness. A fresh-faced, fair-haired young woman at once stepped from behind the counter and inquired in his native tongue in what way she could serve him. She was a friendly-looking young woman, who restored his confidence.

"Have you any boxes of chocolate?" he said. "I want to buy one."

"No 'ouse in all Homburg can offer you zo good a choice as ourzelves," she responded, opening a drawer and producing a large variety.

But Mr. Davidson looked disdainfully at the wares thus offered for his approval.

"These boxes are not nearly good enough," he said. "It is for a present."

"Ah, a present. I understand. You want zomething very, *very* zuperior."

"Yes, the best that can be got, and that will make a good show."

"Ach! I 'ave de very ting," and she opened another drawer at the far end of the shop, and one by one brought forth some half-dozen *bonbonnières*, carefully wrapped up in tissue-paper. After displaying the indecision of a woman, Mr. Davidson was finally persuaded to purchase the most beautiful of the lot—a pale blue satin box exquisitely hand-painted with snowdrops and primroses.

"Emblematic of the Spring," he murmured to himself. "That will just suit her."

This box he ordered to be filled with the finest chocolate, and stood by to watch the operation. His ordinary cautiousness seemed to have deserted him, for not until it was heaped to the brim did he inquire the price.

"Fifty-five marks," said the well-pleased shop-woman, "or two pounds fifteen zhillings of your English money."

It seemed a good deal, but Mr. Davidson happened to be in a singularly magnanimous mood. If he could secure a title for his daughter and at the same time show to a pretty girl his recognition of the service she had rendered him in bringing the young people together, it would be difficult to find fault with the justice and reasonableness of the present outlay. It was only money put out at interest, as he sagely reflected. So he paid the bill without a murmur, tucked the box of chocolates under his arm, and with a lightness of heart, conferred by the sense of his own generosity, proceeded to pay a morning call on Miss Dawkins.

Arrived at her lodgings in the Obere Promenade, he met with a tolerably severe disappointment. All the morning he had been picturing to himself the highly agreeable forenoon he should spend in that young lady's society, listening to her lively sallies,

and being initiated into the sayings and doings of the fashionable world. It was therefore quite a blow when the maid-servant informed him that the ladies were both out.

"Do you expect them back soon?" he inquired. "If so I will call again."

"No, she could not say." The ladies had not said where they were going or ordered any luncheon at home. They might be one hour and they might be three or four. All she knew was that they expected company that afternoon.

There was nothing for Mr. Davidson but to retrace his footsteps, which he did, feeling a cooling cloud pass over the first glow of his enthusiasm as a giver. He brought the *bonbonnière* away with him. True, he might have left it, but he could not forego the pleasure of hearing Miss Dawkins again call him "an old dear" to his face. It was gratifying to reflect that he had been an old dear when there were only chocolate and ices in prospect. With a large box of chocolate creams actually in the fair Amelia's possession, might he not be elevated to the rank of an old darling? And it was conceivable that she might even give him a kiss, in pure friendliness, of course, just as if he were her grandfather—no, not exactly her grandfather—her father or brother. Naturally it would mean nothing more than an exceedingly innocent and useful demonstration of pleasure on her part, but he could imagine its being very pleasant to his feelings. Miss Dawkins had a fine waist. He would have liked to put his arm round it in a paternal fashion, if only to point out with perfect propriety and disinterestedness how excessively pernicious it was for young ladies to indulge in the highly injurious practice of tight-lacing. There could have been no harm in that—no harm whatever. These and similar little passages, whilst not actively disagreeable to himself, would doubtless have proved of extreme advantage to Miss Dawkins. His object was to benefit her, and he should have felt like a dispassionate and high-minded benefactor during the process. The girl was young and away from her father and mother. The counsel and guidance of a person so much older than herself could only be for her good, and he believed that Miss Dawkins was quite sensible enough to see matters in their proper light.

Owing to her absence from home, however, he was unable to put his charitable intentions into execution, and was decidedly

disconcerted by their unexpected overthrow. Fortunately the disappointment need only be temporary.

This thought consoled him as he walked back to the hotel. Needless to say he determined not to mention to his wife or daughter where he had been, or allude to the extravagance of which he had been guilty. His wife, he knew, would call him an old fool, and as he wasn't quite sure in his own mind that there might not be some truth in the accusation, he had no desire to hear it made. Consequently he crept quietly upstairs, and before rejoining the ladies, deposited Amelia's *bonbonnière* in a cupboard in his dressing-room. His conscience must have pricked him a little, for being aware of certain prying qualities that distinguished his better-half, he took the trouble to hide it beneath a pile of clean shirts.

He found his wife and Hetty in a flutter of excitement caused by a visit from Mrs. Northcote and Miss Dawkins. It appeared they had only left a few minutes ago, so that he must just have missed them on the way back.

"Amelia wants us to go to tea with her this afternoon," said Hetty, brightly, as her father entered the room. "She said I was to tell you how sorry she was you were out, and how she hopes you will be sure and come."

"Is it to be a regular party?" he inquired, for he much preferred Miss Dawkins alone to Miss Dawkins surrounded by young men. "If so I think I shall get out of it."

"Oh! dear no," answered Mrs. Davidson. "Only just a few friends, who are asked to drop in quite informally. Hetty and I have made up our minds to go, even if you don't care to. Lord Charles is to be there, Sir North and Lady Penywern, Lord O'Banashee, and one or two others. But you can stay behind if you choose."

"No, I think I'll come too. It would be only civil to thank Lord Charles for sending you the flowers."

"I'll do that, never fear. It's me he wants to see—not you; but please yourself."

"I will. I settle to go."

"Very well. It's more respectable, and looks better on the whole to be escorted by one's husband. Besides, the Penywerns will no doubt ask to be introduced. Do you know what I've been thinking, John?"

"No, my dear—how should I? The depths of your great mind are quite beyond my humble powers of divination."

"Well! I've been thinking that we might give a little dinner. Miss Dawkins has been telling us that the fashion here is for people to join together, so that it need not be any expense. I should like to ask Lord Charles. We could pay for him. It would only be right and handsome after the gentlemanly manner in which he has behaved. If we get introduced to the Penywerns we might even invite them also as our guests. There's nothing like being friendly, and meeting people halfway."

"Yes, I see no objection to the plan whatever," said Mr. Davidson, beginning to think he might find his wife a valuable auxiliary. "To tell you the truth, times are fairly good at present, and I don't mind spending a little more than usual just for once, and to see Hetty well started in life."

"How about Mrs. Northcote and Miss Dawkins?" said Mrs. Davidson. "We don't want them," she continued with the usual ingratitude of people who have been the recipients of kindness. "In fact, to tell the truth, they will be very much in the way. The old lady is a poor, weak creature, who seems next door to an idiot, and the girl is very noisy and forward in her manners. Still, considering that the others are all Miss Dawkins' friends, I don't quite see how we can leave them out. They would be sure to hear of our giving a dinner-party, and take offence. People are so absurdly huffy in this world."

"I shouldn't dream of not asking them," said Mr. Davidson, so decidedly that he evoked a grateful glance from Hetty.

"Ah! well!" sighed Mrs. Davidson resignedly, "I suppose we must. But we need not pay for them. They can pay for themselves. After all, the compliment will be much the same, and no doubt they can afford it quite as well as we."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Davidson testily. "In my opinion we are extremely indebted to Miss Dawkins. She has been most kind in introducing us to nice people and looking after Hetty. What would Lord Charles think of us indeed, if it came to his ears that we stood him his dinner because he had a title, and made poor Mrs. Northcote and Miss Dawkins pay for their meal because, like ourselves, they happened to be commoners."



"John, how coarsely and vulgarly you do put things, to be sure. Will you never learn to become more refined?"

"I'm afraid not," he sneered, "if refinement means playing dirty, shabby tricks, that you are ashamed to publish, and wrapping up the truth in a parcel of tissue paper. No, Mrs. Davidson, you may approve of showing the cold shoulder to people in your own rank of life, but I don't. I know the advantage of having a title, and I want Hetty to secure one, but as for telling me that one man is not as good as another, it's all damned rot. Give your party if you like, but either we will pay for none of the guests, or we will pay for all."

Hetty had never admired her father so much as now when he silenced her good mother. She approved entirely of his sentiments.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS TO A CHINA ORANGE.

MR. DAVIDSON was so annoyed with his wife for wishing to make his charming young friend, Miss Dawkins, pay for her dinner, whilst others, who had not served their interests half so well, were to be received as guests, that he resolved to punish her by carrying off matters with a high hand. Consequently, when the ladies, after an elaborate toilette, pronounced themselves ready to start, he boldly appeared with the *bonbonnière* under his arm, and, strong in his own integrity, did not make the slightest effort to conceal it. In fact, when he thought of the shirts, he marvelled at his want of courage, and dubbed himself a poor, weak creature.

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Davidson sharply, eyeing the neatly papered box with considerable suspicion.

"Only a little present for Miss Dawkins," he returned innocently.

In the whole course of Mrs. Davidson's matrimonial experience she had never known her staid and sober lord commit such an unparalleled act of gallantry. Her wifely susceptibilities were immediately aroused, for there is no greater mistake in the world than to suppose that between married couples where there is jealousy there must necessarily be love. In scores of cases the green-eyed monster exists without any compensation in the

shape of affection. Mr. Davidson was distinctly aware of this fact.

"Miss Dawkins indeed!" exclaimed the lady resentfully. "I never heard of such a thing as your wanting to make *her* presents. That girl has regularly infatuated you. For my part, I can't think what you see in her."

"I see a nice, lively, pleasant, unaffected and unconventional young woman, full of spirits and good-humour."

"Dear me!" she retorted scornfully. "What a string of adjectives to be sure. The idea of your going fooling your money away on a pert little chit like Amelia Dawkins, when your own wife and daughter are in want of ever so many things, and have the greatest difficulty in screwing a sixpence out of you."

"That is scarcely a correct statement on your part, my dear Emma. Hetty will testify that I paid all her dressmaker's bills before she came away. I am well off, but not a Cræsus."

"What's that got to do with Miss Dawkins? May I ask what you have been buying? I suppose that was the reason you stole out this morning in such an underhand manner. No doubt you were ashamed to let your wife and daughter know what you were about. I suppose it's jewellery, eh?" And she peered inquisitively at the parcel seeking to ascertain its contents.

"Don't alarm yourself, Emma," he responded, so cheerfully as to still further aggravate his already incensed spouse. "It's nothing that will ruin us. We shall not have to put down our establishment in consequence, nor send away the gardeners, nor make any visible retrenchment."

"That's no answer to my question. I asked what you had been buying?"

"Well, if you must know, only a few chocolates. Surely nothing could be more harmless."

"Oh! Papa," interposed Hetty, her lovely face beaming with a smile of approbation. "How nice of you. Amelia loves chocolates. They are her favourite sweets."

"Humph! They are my favourite sweets also," said Mrs. Davidson grimly; "and what's more, it's my birthday to-day. Only nobody takes any notice of that fact. "Oh! dear no, of course not. People can't be expected to remember anything in connection with their own wives when they take up with bits of

girls of eighteen, young enough to be their great, great grand-daughters." She paused as if awaiting a reply, then finding that none came, concluded viciously, "Mr. Davidson"—she frequently called him Mr. Davidson when enraged—"you're a fool."

"Thank you, my dear," he answered, with a calm which invariably added fuel to the fire. "You have been good enough to present that fact such a vast number of times to my notice that I am fully alive to it. At the same time, your conduct appears to me somewhat inconsistent. Being so persuaded that I am a fool, why should you evince surprise if I act like one? It is but an inevitable consequence. You are not logical."

"Oh! don't reason with me—it's quite useless. I know when I'm right, and I know when I'm wrong; and if you were to argue till Doomsday, you couldn't make your conduct appear proper and respectable in my eyes. Old married men have no business to go gadding after young women. If you don't look out, you'll end by getting hopelessly led astray by an artful, brazen, and designing girl, who cares no more for you than she does for the man in the moon."

"I never was vain enough to suppose that I held a place in Miss Dawkins' affections," he rejoined. "From what I can gather they are already engaged in an entirely different quarter. You may set your mind at rest on that score, Emma. I am not the fortunate individual who has gained our fair friend's love."

Mrs. Davidson pricked up her ears. Amelia as Hetty's rival was even more obnoxious than Amelia as the unscrupulous corrupter of her husband's morals—the destroyer of a happy and united family's peace.

"You don't mean to say that the forward minx is setting her cap at Lord Charles? Ha, ha!" and she laughed hysterically, "a nice sort of person she'd be for the Duke of Skyedale to have as his daughter-in-law."

"If your own penetration has not succeeded in discovering the lucky man to whom I allude," said Mr. Davidson in reply, "it is scarcely fair for me to mention his name. Suffice it that Lord Charles' image is not the one that fills Miss Dawkins' virgin heart at the present moment."

Mrs. Davidson heaved a sigh of relief. The prospect of Amelia being exalted to the peerage was terrible.

"I'm delighted to hear it," she said. "But there—I never

would believe that such a very charming and distinguished young man could have been so foolish as to fall in love with Miss Dawkins, or to commit such a shocking *mésalliance*."

"You would rather he married Hetty, eh?" observed Mr. Davidson, jocularly. "Well, well; I agree with you."

"Hetty," said his better half grandly, "occupies a very different position. Miss Dawkins' father is only a carpet manufacturer, and nothing surprises me so much as to see her tolerated in Homburg society."

"She has a head on her shoulders," he said, "but we need not discuss the subject any more. A pretty, jolly girl generally makes her way wherever she is. Hulloo! Here we are at our destination."

"You seem to know the road most wonderfully well, considering how recent is our arrival," remarked Mrs. Davidson, firing off a parting shot with more than common asperity. To her still further indignation, it struck home. In spite of an attempt at indifference, his countenance assumed a decided guilty expression. Not one man in a hundred can run the gauntlet of the wifely inquisition without compromising himself by word or look. The lady's thin lips became ominously compressed. It was fortunate for both parties that they had come to the end of their journey. An active outbreak of hostility appeared imminent.

"My bump of locality was always fairly good," he answered lamely enough.

"And since your arrival in Homburg it has become astonishingly developed," she sneered in return. "And——"

But here her speech was nipped in the bud by the opening of the hall-door, followed by their speedy introduction into Mrs. Northcote's sitting-room. That lady came forward to greet them with a smile of welcome on her placid, kindly face. Several guests had already assembled, amongst them being the Penywerns, Lord Charles Mountgard, and Lord O'Banashee. A buzz of conversation, accompanied by the occasional sound of laughter, filled the small apartment, whilst the golden rays of the afternoon sun pouring in and illumining the scarlet geraniums and gorgeous nasturtiums climbing up the balcony, gave it quite a gay and cheerful appearance. After an exchange of compliments on either side, a seat was found for Mrs. Davidson beside Lady Penywern, who proved to be a charming, motherly, white-

haired old lady, overflowing with the milk of human kindness, and as willing to talk pleasantly to a tradesman's wife as to a duchess. She kept up a perpetual stream of small talk, and enchanted Mrs. Davidson by her condescension.

"So affable, so sympathetic, so easy to get on with," said that lady rapturously, whenever she hereafter mentioned the name of her dear friend, Lady Penywern. "We took to each other at first sight."

Meantime, Mr. Davidson crossed the room to where Amelia was standing, and bashfully presented her with the little offering that had been the cause of a matrimonial discussion, and had brought down on his devoted head the vials of Mrs. Davidson's wrath. Fortunately for Miss Dawkins, she was unaware of the fact that she had caused dissensions to arise between husband and wife. With hasty fingers she tore off the *bonbonnière's* many paper coverings, and when it became revealed in all its glory, and opening the lid she perceived its fascinating contents, her delight knew no bounds. Despite the husk of worldly wisdom in which she wrapped herself up, she was still a child at heart, gifted with a fine, natural capacity for enjoyment. It is just possible that, had they been alone, some portion of Mr. Davidson's imaginings might have been realised. The publicity of the gift, however, effectually prevented any private expressions of gratitude. Nevertheless the hard old money-maker had his reward.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, ecstatically, lifting her eyes to his with such pure unfeigned pleasure shining in them that he felt his pulses tingle with gratification. "How good—how awfully good of you! I really don't know how to thank you enough. Such a lovely *bonbonnière*. Why, it is quite a work of art, independent of its contents. Here, Hetty! Charlie! North!" calling to the young people who stood near, "come and help me to eat these delicious chocolates. Auntie, dear," addressing Mrs. Northcote, "just see what Mr. Davidson has given me. Is it not kind of him? Lord O'Banashee," with a smile, "I need not offer you any sweets, you prefer culling them for yourself." So she continued to pour forth her joy, whilst Mr. Davidson experienced such a sensation of unselfish satisfaction as it was very, very long since he had felt. He began to understand that the pleasure of giving might in some instances be as great as the pleasure of hoarding. The discovery came to him late in life, and hardly soon enough

to make a permanent impression. Still, the transient warmth kindled by his unaccustomed act of generosity was singularly agreeable. Any lingering regrets for the expenditure of those fifty-odd marks vanished, chased away by Miss Dawkins' smiles, and by Miss Dawkins' round, merry blue eyes that gave to her face such a charmingly childish and roguish appearance.

Presently hearty old Sir North Penywern joined the group. He was a most favourable specimen of the sporting English gentleman who races, bets, gambles, is constantly hard up for money, lives on the best of everything, and is adored by his wife, children, and servants. Indeed, it was hard to resist the frankness and geniality of his manner. No more popular man existed than Sir North Penywern. He was a member of the Jockey Club, kept a pack of hounds, from forty to fifty race-horses, and even at sixty-seven years of age managed to extract a great deal of enjoyment out of life. He dressed in the old-fashioned style, with a blue frock-coat, buff waistcoat and stiff white stock, and his rosy, smiling face, with its framework of silvery hair, rendered him as pleasing a representative of a country gentleman as Lord O'Banashee was the reverse. The two men, indeed, formed a striking contrast; the baronet with his plain hearty speech, the peer scattering honied compliments around that were flavoured by a kind of coarse vulgarity and sensuality. And yet the one, outside of sporting circles, was scarcely known, whilst the other dined with princes of the blood—aye, and even with Princesses, and had climbed to the highest rung of the Social ladder given to the parasite to attain. So much for money! Who shall say that he is not a base god, at whose door may be laid the greater portion of the meannesses and crimes for which human nature is responsible? He makes the bad worse, and does the virtuous no good. His power is vast, far-reaching, and insidious, and includes equally crowned heads and the ragged beggar tramping the roads, not knowing where to look for his next meal. Money had made Lord O'Banashee. It had given him his title, his position, his success. There was only one thing it could not do. It could not present him with fine manners.

"Miss Dawkins," said Sir North, "I've come to talk to you about the Frankfort Races. They are fixed for the fifth of August, which will soon be here now, and I am getting up my party. Lady Penywern is afraid of the fatigue of so long a day,

but Mrs. Northcote has kindly promised to act as chaperon to the young ladies. May I count upon you?"

"Most certainly," responded Amelia. "Although auntie does not look the least like a horsey woman, she is awfully fond of races, and loves a race-course."

"So I have found out," said Sir North. Then he stopped, looked at Hetty, and added: "Do you think your young friend here could be prevailed upon to join us?"

Amelia laughed.

"I shouldn't think she'd want much persuading, Sir North. By-the-way, do you know Mr. Davidson?"

The two gentlemen bowed, and the baronet, addressing his new acquaintance, said:

"It will give me great pleasure if you will allow your daughter to accompany Miss Dawkins and Mrs. Northcote on the fifth. Unfortunately my space is limited, else nothing would have afforded me more satisfaction than to offer you and Mrs. Davidson seats on the coach. If you can manage to get to the course, however, by some other means, I shall have plenty of lunch going about two o'clock."

Mr. Davidson expressed his thanks, but declared, that he cared very little for races, and did not think of attending those to be held at Frankfort. To Hetty's great delight, he offered no opposition to her accepting Sir North's invitation. It was, therefore, arranged that she should go under the escort of Mrs. Northcote.

"I hear that Jerry O'Hagan is coming all the way over from Ireland, on purpose to ride the favourite in the big race," went on Sir North, addressing the company at large. "It's a steeple-chase—four miles over the country—value 3,000 marks. Jerry's safe to win, though a rummer course it would be hard to find. All the same, I'd like to lay five hundred pounds to a china orange that he shows a pair of clean heels to the foreigners. I never saw one yet who could ride a steeple-chase."

"I take the bet," said a voice at his elbow. "That is, if you are in earnest and really mean it."

Sir North gave a start and so did Hetty. The tell-tale colour rushed to her cheeks in a crimson wave.

"Hulloa, Von Kessler!" exclaimed the baronet. "I declare you positively startled me. I had no idea you were in the room,



or should not have been guilty of the discourtesy of expressing my sentiments so openly. When did you come?"

"But this moment, and I happened to overhear your concluding remarks. I do not quarrel with them. I admit that we Germans have yet to win our spurs between the flags. But we do not despair. For that reason I ask, are you prepared to stand by the bet you made just now?" And Karl's blue eyes glittered coldly.

"Yes, quite," answered Sir North, promptly, not choosing to show his surprise at being tackled in this bold manner.

"I may have some difficulty in purchasing a china orange," continued Herr Von Kessler, with a peculiar smile, that for the moment gave to his handsome face a sinister and inscrutable expression. "It is not an article generally in demand. Shall we make the bet something else instead—that is if you have no objection."

"By all means! only don't let the sum be large. I know O'Hagan and you don't. He is bound to win if his horse stands upright. Bar accidents, he holds the race safe. I have no wish to rob you of your money. We will say 500 to 50."

"As you please," returned Karl, with an assumption of indifference. "It's all one to me." Thus speaking, he drew from his pocket a note-book, in which, after the most orthodox sporting fashion, he carefully recorded the bet.

"Ha," said Sir North jocularly, "it's not the first time you've been on a race-course, I can see."

"We Germans do not pretend to rival you English," rejoined Herr Von Kessler, in tones of such gentle deprecation that they verged on the confines of irony. "Nevertheless, a few of us are fond of the Turf. Perhaps," he added, after a slight hesitation, "I ought to have told you before now that it is my intention to ride in the race."

"No, is it indeed?" exclaimed the baronet. "That's awfully sporting of you." But to himself he muttered, "Pooh, it makes no difference. My money is safe enough. A great hulking foreigner like our good friend here cannot have the ghost of a chance against an experienced jockey. Besides, it's too late to eat my own words now, even if I would. How he snapped me up though. If he had been a professional bookmaker he could not have been more ready."

"My friend Herr Von Oehlschlager has asked me to ride a

horse of his," explained Karl, with Teutonic composure. "He is a very good horse. I know him well, and he is English bred, though born in this country. Von Oehlschlager hunted him one season in England. My friend intended to have ridden him himself. Unfortunately, he met with an accident whilst shooting, two days ago, and has injured three of the fingers of his right hand, which, by the doctor's orders, he is now forced to carry in a sling. And so," he concluded, with an air of proud confidence which became him well—at least, so thought Hetty—"I have promised to take his place."

"And, no doubt, you will act as a most excellent substitute," said Sir North, politely. "Pardon me one question," casting a dubious glance at the giant's fine proportions, "but can you ride the weight?"

"Ach!" said Karl, with a sigh of regret, "that is the worst part of the business. I am what you call banting. "I eat nothing; I drink nothing. It is a severe test of friendship. Beer I dare not touch till after the race is over. But I have already lost three pounds in two days. It may prove an effort, still I shall manage to scale the weight."

"If you do it will be by much self-denial," returned the baronet, with a smile of commiseration. "May I ask the name of your horse? One always likes to know this sort of things beforehand."

"He is called Adare. His sire was Lowlander; his dam, Violetta by Speculation."

"Ah!" said Sir North, "for a steeple-chaser he has some good blood in his veins. And you really think Adare capable of beating the favourite?—though, perhaps, that is hardly a fair question."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### "A REGULAR DARLING."

AGAIN the same strange expression stole over Herr Von Kessler's face, which robbed it, temporarily, of its good looks.

"My humble opinion is of little value," he said, in tones of quiet sarcasm, "and Adare will not have the advantage of being ridden by an English jockey. If, by any chance, the favourite should fall, then my friend's horse will win. I cannot tell you more, because I do not know more than that myself."

"Thanks very much for your candour," said Sir North, cordially. "I wish you all luck. By-the-bye, remember that you are engaged to dine with me on the night of the races at the Café Casino in Frankfort. We can settle the hour later on. I am told that one gets a tidy dinner there."

"There is no better place to dine in all Frankfort," responded Karl with enthusiasm. "The cooking is perfection. They give you a *Sôle à la Normande*, which is quite—quite too excellent, and their wines are celebrated all over Germany. Yes, decidedly you cannot do better than dine at the Café Casino. But take my advice. Don't order your dinner *à la carte*; be content with the *dîner du jour*. You cannot surpass it."

Karl was an authority on culinary matters, and he spoke with an animation which he had not hitherto evinced. His countenance grew quite bright as he continued to discourse on the merits of the Café Casino *chef*.

"That is settled, then," said Sir North at last, beginning to weary a little of the subject, for though no one liked a good meal better than he, he could not gloat over it beforehand, or derive ecstatic delight, as did Herr Von Kessler, from its mere contemplation. "Don't forget that I can give you a lift home on my coach, should you happen to want one." So saying, Sir North made his way over to the other side of the room, in order once more to enter into conversation with Mrs. Northcote, who, in spite of her quiet, retiring habits, was a special favourite of his. Meantime, Amelia had been doing duty by keeping both Mr. Davidson and Lord O'Banashee amused. Her remarks, no doubt, were spicy, for they elicited considerable merriment, and every mark of approval from her elderly beaux. Lord Charles and Mr. Penywern, as familiars of the establishment, were making themselves extremely useful by handing about cups of tea and plates of bread and butter. It was scarcely an occupation that set off their natural graces to advantage, and they performed it with many blushes, much clumsiness and frequent accidents, condoned by the humblest of apologies. A third young man thumped a harmless cottage piano, as if his sole object were to break its strings, and prevent everyone from hearing what his or her neighbour was saying. In this he was singularly successful, and earned a whole chorus of thanks in the shape of, "Oh! how delightful! Please don't leave off. What a touch, what execu-

tion, what power over the instrument." It was true ; the instrument creaked and groaned under the vigorous assaults of his muscular hands, as if tormented beyond all endurance. But this beautiful music answered the purpose it generally does on such occasions. It made a noise—a diabolical one—and it set people talking. Their tongues wagged faster and faster, and seemed to enter into friendly rivalry with the discord drawn from the piano. In short, Amelia's modest party was a success. She understood the difficult art of making even an afternoon tea go off well. If a trifle noisy, it contained no elements of dulness, and she had actually managed to secure about one man to every six ladies. For, although Mr. Davidson had been led to believe that the gathering would not be large, the little room was crammed ; Amelia having conceived the laudable project of showing Hetty off to all her friends and giving her what she called a good start to begin with.

During a magnificent crash, which caused the whole apartment to vibrate with sound, Hetty found sufficient courage to look up at the splendid Karl, who stood erect in his tight uniform by her side, and said in tones of timid anxiety, that were incense to his masculine vanity, conveying, as they did, an unutterable admiration of his courage and daring :

"Are you really going to ride in the steeple-chase, Herr Von Kessler ?"

"Yes," he answered lightly. "Why not ? I am looking forward to it immensely."

"I should be so frightened. Even as it is, the very thought of your running such a risk makes me shiver."

He laughed. Her feminine fear appeared to him charmingly childish and delightful.

"Ach," he said, giving an exceedingly fierce and warlike twirl to his moustache, which increased her respect for him a thousand-fold, "it is not permitted to us soldiers to know the meaning of the word fear. Our profession does not tolerate cowards, and I shall hope to show you that I am no unworthy member of our great German army. Did I understand you to say, Miss Davidson, that you were coming to the races ?"

"Yes," she replied. "Sir North Penywern has just been kind enough to ask me to accompany his party."

"So ! In that case, I shall most certainly avail myself of his

invitation to dinner, and to ride back to Homburg on his coach. I had intended sleeping the night at Frankfort, but now, I no longer propose doing so."

This subtle speech made a great impression on Hetty. She did not detect its cunning, and had not the least idea that Karl's intention of spending the night in Frankfort was concocted on the spur of the moment. She accepted all his utterances as Gospel truth after the usual credulous and trustful manner of very young girls, who are too ignorant of the ways of the world to detect the wolf in sheep's clothing, who bounds boldly into their quiet and peaceful fold.

Hetty's heart began to beat with fast, irregular motion. Was it really true that she had the power to influence Herr Von Kessler's actions? The mere thought sent a delirious ecstasy tingling through her veins, which owed its birth not merely to vanity, but also to some deeper, truer, and more enduring feeling. That need of affection, that hungering after love and sympathy, which, since her return home, she had so constantly experienced, now overcame her spirit with a strength and force hitherto unknown. Ah! how happy could she be with such a man as Karl to protect her, to care for her, to call her wife. The crimson blood rushed to her face. His eyes were fixed on hers. Thank goodness, he could not read the bold, unmaidenly thoughts passing at that minute through her mind. If he could, she must have died of shame.

"I—I do hope you will win," she said softly. "I am sure you deserve to if anyone does."

"What!" he exclaimed in mock astonishment. "You actually side with a foreigner, against your own countrymen? That is most unpatriotic, and for an Englishwoman, remarkably unusual. What makes you so free from insular prejudice?"

She dropped her eyes, and with the point of her parasol followed the pattern of the carpet.

"I don't know this Mr. O'Hagan, and I do know you. That makes all the difference."

"Does it? I ought to feel extremely flattered; but tell me the truth. Do you really believe I am capable of beating the brilliant O'Hagan across a country? Remember, he is at an old game, whilst I aspire to win laurels at a new."

"It does not matter. I believe," and she suddenly lifted her

dark velvety eyes to his, with a look of such intense admiration that it caused his pulses to thrill, "you are capable of beating any one you choose, be he French, Austrian, German or English. You have the power to succeed in whatever you undertake. That is my belief."

The careless expression left his countenance. At her words he became grave, earnest, concentrated.

"Thank you," he said simply. "You give me heart, for you are the first English lady or gentleman I have met who places the least confidence in my horsemanship. Even your good Sir Penywern laughed at it in his sleeve when he made that bet. My pride is aroused, and events may yet prove that the flattering opinion you entertain of me is not wholly undeserved."

"I am sure of it," she rejoined warmly. "Who is this Mr. O'Hagan Sir North thinks such a lot of?"

"He is a well-known gentleman jockey, who, both in England and Ireland, yearly wins many races. His services are much sought after, and Baron Roederer, the owner of the favourite—a horse called Sanscoin—has sent for him to come to Frankfort. He pays all O'Hagan's travelling expenses, and, as I happen to know, makes him a very handsome present besides, in addition to half the stakes, if Sanscoin wins. In fact, it is quite worth the Irishman's while to take the journey."

"And in spite of everything, you think Adare has a chance?" asked Hetty, with interest.

Karl Von Kessler lowered his voice to a confidential key. He had made up his mind to win the race, and, if possible, a still more valuable prize. And he was beginning to think that the higher prize might be even easier of attainment than the lesser one.

"Look here, Miss Davidson," he said. "I don't mind telling you what I wouldn't tell anybody else. Adare is a real good horse—a much better horse indeed than is generally known. Moreover, he has the advantage of knowing the course, since, at the present moment, he is being galloped over it every morning. He can stay all day, and is so quick at his fences that he is bound to gain at every jump. Added to this," and Karl set his jaw in a fashion which Hetty thought simply adorable, and betokened the strength of a Hercules, "he will have the advantage of a man on his back, who, if not so finished a jockey as Jerry

O'Hagan, would give all he possesses to show some of you proud English people that a German can ride."

And Karl drew himself up, and inflated his chest to such an extent that his uniform looked as if it must burst.

"You don't think *me* proud, surely?" said Hetty reproachfully, feeling hurt at being included in the accusation.

"If I were to tell you what I thought of you, you would only be angry," he rejoined.

"No, I shouldn't."

"Yes, you would."

"Try then, and see," and she smiled upon him with the smile of a siren.

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes, quite." Hetty's curiosity to know what he thought of her overcame all lingering vestiges of prudence. If it had not been for that friendly piano, the conversation could never have reached so delightfully exciting a point.

Karl bent his stately head till his warm breath stirred the little golden rings that lay so delicately on her white brow.

"Very well, then. You must take the consequences. I—I think you a regular darling—there!" . . .

A long pause succeeded this confession. Hetty's whole being was flooded with such a host of delicious emotions that they kept her tongue-tied. Karl was the first to speak. He distrusted her prolonged silence. Perhaps he had been too precipitate. One never quite knew how to deal with girls. They varied so curiously, and displayed such subtle shades of character.

"You are angry with me, after all," he said, speaking in penitent accents. "I knew how it would be. It was foolish of me to allow myself to be persuaded into uttering my real sentiments. It is better to dissemble."

His humble speech made her blush for the reality. Again she congratulated herself on his not being aware of what was passing within her brain. Angry! Ah! if he only knew what a mockery it was, his deeming it necessary to apologise. Her whole frame quivered with rapture. It was bliss to her to be told that he thought her a darling.

"No," she said, striving hard to conceal the agitation from which she suffered. "I am not angry," and she turned away her



head, as if unable to endure the steely radiance of his light blue eyes. "I—I am surprised, but not cross."

"Are you sure?" he persisted. "Quite sure? I should be absolutely wretched if I thought I had really offended you."

Foolish little girl! where was she drifting to? In the hands of this big soldier, she was as a puppet. He seemed to deprive her of all will, or individual power of action, and reduced her to an automaton forced to follow wherever he led.

His face lit up with a satisfied smile. She had not given him an answer to his question, but he needed none.

"Since I have not the misfortune to be in your bad books," he said, "I make so bold as to ask a favour."

Hetty trembled.

"What is it?" she asked, almost inaudibly.

"Give me the rose you are wearing this afternoon. On the day of the races it shall serve as a badge to remind me that although your countrymen may be against me there is one in whom I have a true and staunch supporter."

Without a word Hetty unfastened the rose that nestled close to the white column of her throat. Its leaves, where they had touched her transparent skin, were warm, and emitted a powerful fragrance. He stooped his lips to the flower, and looking the girl straight in the face with clear, bold eyes, said:

"Dear rose, ever will I keep thee and cherish thee for the sake of the giver, who—but there! I must not annoy her again with foolish praise, which, on so short an acquaintance, I can hardly expect her to believe is genuine."

She coloured deeply, partly from pleasure, partly from a dim, vague sense that he was going on very rapidly.

Ah! if she could but believe him. When Amelia had called him a sad flirt, did she mean that he talked like this to every girl of his acquaintance? If only that doubt were solved! It haunted her, and where all her wish was not to distrust, introduced a faint, but disturbing, element of incredulity into their relations. The careless hint acted as an insidious poison; and yet—and yet he conquered her spirit. She did not attempt to disguise this fact. He affected her as no other man had hitherto done. She could not tell the why or the wherefore; she only knew that it was so, and from the first, apparently realised the

utter uselessness of opposing her feeble strength to his. He fascinated and commanded her.

"Will you wear my colours on the fifth?" asked Karl, emboldened by her blushes and evident confusion.

"What are they?"

"They are your own," he rejoined, pointing to the auburn ripples of her hair. "Blue and gold. None could suit you better. Will you confer courage on your elected jockey by granting him this kindness?"

"Yes, if you wish it, Herr von Kessler," said Hetty, delighted, yet embarrassed, by his warmth.

"I do wish it; and to prove to you where my thoughts are, this rose, even though faded and withered, shall adorn my button-hole on the eventful day. Already it gives me a presentiment of victory. Ach! it will bring good luck."

"Come, come, Von Kessler," said Lord O'Banashee, with familiar jocularly, suddenly breaking in upon their *tête-à-tête*. "You have flirted quite enough with Miss Davidson for one day. Give somebody else a chance, there's a good fellow, and make way for Age and Honesty. That's only fair play—don't you think so, Miss Davidson?" appealing to Hetty as if confident of her support. But Karl held his ground stoutly, and was not easily to be put to flight. He had ascertained from Amelia that the Davidsons' stay in Homburg was not likely to extend over four weeks, and he was quite resolved to make hay whilst the sun shone. This beautiful heiress of rich and elderly parents was very much to his mind. He admired her immensely. He thought her a good, innocent little thing, likely to give no trouble, and he highly approved of an ailing and white-haired father-in-law, whose life upon earth was, in all human probability, but short. He had never yet succeeded in discovering such a combination of feminine and matrimonial perfections as represented by Hetty. If he let her slip through his fingers, just for want of a little timely audacity, he should be a fool. The fortress had already been approached, and showed quite unexpected symptoms of internal weakness. He was not one to allow himself to be ousted from the battle-field by an under-sized gentleman, possessing a sallow face, carrotty hair, and irregular teeth. He had more faith in his fascinations than that. Still, as an intimate friend of Prince Friskovitch, it did not do to offend Lord O'Banashee. Conse-

quently, although he refused to take his lordship's hint, and retire altogether, he allowed him to monopolise the conversation.

"A very successful little gathering," said Lord O'Banashee, taking a condescending survey of the guests—"a very successful little gathering, indeed. I had no idea, when Miss Dawkins asked me to come here this afternoon, that I should find Youth and Beauty so well represented. The Penywerns, too, and Lord Charles Mountgard. Yes, they are quite the right sort—quite the right sort. Upon my word, the whole affair does Miss Dawkins great credit."

"I am sure Amelia will feel flattered by your approval," said Hetty, demurely.

"Ah! Well, you may tell her from me that she's getting on very nicely—very nicely indeed. By-the-way, I had a letter from His Serene Highness, Prince Friskovitch, this morning. He's coming here on Monday. Would you like to see it?"

"I think I have already seen the letter," Hetty attempted to say, trying to hide a smile of amusement.

"No doubt you would like to see the Prince's handwriting," went on Lord O'Banashee, quite ignoring the interruption. "It will be a great thing for a young lady like you to talk about afterwards. Oh, you can pass over the beginning—that's only his Highness's joke. He always calls me Useful Timothy when we are together. It's his way. He must have a laugh at something. Very light-hearted man, Prince Friskovitch. Never knew better company—never. Full of fun and anecdote. An interesting letter, isn't it?—thought you'd like to have a look at it."

"Very," said Hetty who, having read the contents only that morning, had scarcely glanced at them. "I wonder you venture to carry so precious a document about with you in your pocket. You might lose it."

"Aye; that's very true. It never occurred to me before, but you are right—quite right, Miss Davidson. Will you forgive me if I admire your hat? It is most becoming—reminds one of Titian, Rubens, and all that sort of thing. You look positively bewitching. I trust when I have the honour to introduce you to His Serene Highness, that you will wear that hat. The contrast between its pale blue brim and your lovely golden locks is quite enchanting."

"My hair is red—or, at best, auburn," said Hetty, bluntly, "not golden."

"Ah! auburn, is it? So much the better. My dear Miss Davidson, let me congratulate you. If there is one colour the Prince dotes on more than another, it is auburn. He always admires fair-haired women, and has a perfect passion for blondes."

"Do you remember the fancy he took last season to La Zingretti?" asked Karl, with a laugh. "Things were getting quite serious."

The conversation here, to Hetty's great relief, became general, and lost the personal tone which she so much disliked. Moreover, she was conscious of Lord Charles' eye being upon her, and this consciousness, after his remarks with reference to Lord O'Banashee, rendered her exceedingly reserved and uncomfortable. So much so, that she was glad when he joined their party, followed by North Penywern, who forsook Amelia to swell the circle of her friend's masculine admirers.

Hetty's success was great; and, conscious of the admiration she excited, she became unusually animated, losing somewhat of her simplicity, and adopting that tone of banter which is prevalent in polite society. She did not care about the opinions of the others, but she was seized by a feverish desire to gain Karl's approbation. It was not enough that he should think her pretty. She wanted him to think her clever into the bargain. Somehow or other, a kind of secret communication seemed established between them. She was on different terms with him than with anyone else in the room, and yet nobody appeared aware of the fact save their own two selves. This, in great measure, constituted its charm. For her and Karl to have a private understanding, even although that private understanding only meant that she was to wear a blue dress on a certain day, whilst he adopted a faded rose as a button-hole, set every fibre of her being quivering with delight. This delight reached its climax when, after bidding his hostess good-bye, Karl took her—Hetty's—hand in his, and giving it an unmistakably warm pressure, whispered in a voice intended for her ears only:

"Good-bye, *darling*, you won't forget our compact?"

Darling! This was the second time he had called her by that name. If he were really nothing but an arrant flirt, she ought, by rights, to have been furiously angry with him. Amelia

had distinctly made the accusation. But she didn't believe it. No, she couldn't bring herself to believe a single word against him. People might scoff at love at first sight, but after her own experience, she could not henceforth profess to be a sceptic. There was such a thing as one person being violently attracted by another, just as if a powerful electric current subsisted between them. Some might go through their lives and never feel this strange and subtle physical magnetism. They might deny its existence, but she, who was bound as if by a spell, whose entire nature appeared subjugated, and had been moved to its very foundations, no longer dared to do so. She hardly realized as yet the full import of what was taking place within her breast. Foolish? Yes—call her foolish if you like. But what sort of place would the world be, if we were all of us wise at eighteen, and possessed no illusions, no fancy and imagination?

And where would the men find wives, if young girls saw things as they are, and went in for Reality instead of Romance and Idealism?

*(To be continued.)*

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## Yet Another Impression.

OBER-AMMERGAU, 1890.

By CHRISTABEL R. COLERIDGE.

"What went ye out for to see?"

STREAMS of flies, omnibuses, breaks and nondescript traps, containing foreign tourists in waterproofs or ulsters; on foot, troops of peasants in fashionable flower-trimmed hats, with bundles in their hands, all pouring into a long green valley, between hills solemn with dark fir trees, or bright with birch and bracken.

On either side of the straight, wide road are houses, near together, but separate from each other, of the shape known as "Swiss cottages," painted green and blue and white, with large staring frescoes of sacred subjects or little shrines and carved figures upon the walls. Presently, the one road parts into innumerable streets, the separate houses stand about here, there and everywhere in utter confusion. Wooden stalls, half-finished booths, open-air restaurants are dotted about as if at a fair, gaudily decorated, piled with fruit, rolls and sausages, or hung with carvings, metal work, and imitation antiquities.

On the hill tops, by the roadside, on the stalls among the various curiosities, stand great crucifixes, solemn and still, and, among the rushing crowd of smart girls, untidy tourists, tired travellers, here and there appears a curly-headed soft-eyed child, like an infant angel, or a tall long-haired man with a noticeable face, and people say: "There goes St. John!" or, "That is St. Peter," or, "The Christus is coming—look!"

It is like a fair or a feast, it is like an international exhibition before it is quite finished, visited by several cheap trips and Temperance outings. It is, perhaps, like a mediæval Pardon or Pilgrimage, and yet, in its strange incongruity, it is like nothing but itself, for this is Ober-Ammergau, on the day before a performance of the Passion Play.

And the state of mind of the visitor is equally varied.

"Where shall we sleep?" "How shall we feed?" "What shall we buy?" "Shall we ever get any vehicle to take us

away again?" "Where's Cook's agent?" "Where are our places?" "Will it be very cold?" "Will it be very harrowing?" "I think I wish I had stayed away." "I don't believe I shall be able to see!" "Will it—can it seem like seeing Himself?" "I shall be so desperately hungry, and suppose we lose our places when we go to get lunch?" "Suppose it rains." Probably it does, and the modern pilgrim goes to bed feeling that it is impossible to feel anything at all, but that the pillows are stuffed with hay, which smells clean but unusual, and that, if the window is shut, it is stuffy; and, if it is open, it is damp. There is a noise of wheels and tramping and fuss. Perhaps guns don't fire at intervals all night; but they begin very early in the morning, with more footsteps, more wheels and more chatter. And then the church bell clear and high, like the message of an angel. Within the church solemn music, gaudy decorations, fragrant incense, misty lights and splendid vestments, the tinkling bell, the sweet incomprehensible Latin mingled with responses in harsh guttural German, the kneeling crowd of accustomed worshippers, and the respectful puzzled strangers watching for a cue. All blends into a suitable, mystical whole.

Then, out into the chill, damp air; breakfast quick—dry rolls and weak coffee, then hurrying on with the stream of people past the booths and the wooden restaurants, the curiosities and the crucifixes, the sausages and the sweetmeats, on into the great wooden building, like a grand stand at a race-course, to find the narrow seat allotted to each spectator, and to see—What?

There is the vast and various audience; the sea of peasants whose eyes have been accustomed to sensational horrors and gaudy wax dolls; there also is the Anglican, trained by the refined taste and delicate reticence of the English Prayer Book, backed by the ineradicable severity of English Puritanism. There are also some who regard what they have come to see only as a new treatment of an ancient myth; but who, nevertheless, cannot escape from the inheritance of that same taste and severity. And, in these days of cheap travelling, there are many from both sides of the Atlantic, with no artistic training at all, and with religious instincts, in many cases, at least as unlike those of the Anglican as his are to those of the German peasant.

In front, the wide grey sky and the surrounding hills, among which the two "streets of Jerusalem" with their Eastern houses



seem to come to an end. And in the midst, across the sea of heads and the long line of the high uncovered stage, the front of a Greek temple, with Scripture subjects instead of Pagan ones on the plinth and pilasters, and on the "drop scene" that closes it, patterns and figures like those of a church window.

A western and watery sun struggles out over the Eastern scenery, the cuckoo "tells her name" somewhere close by, and other familiar little birds mingle their twittering notes with the voices of the chorus, and fly in and out among the stately figures who march slowly on to the stage, and in their strange half classic garments, in a tongue strange to many of their audience, proclaim familiar truths, tell over again "the old, old story:"

"Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled."

With the sound of their not perfect but most appropriate music, the curious sense of incongruity passes away, and all the various elements that make up the great Passion Play fall into one harmonious whole.

And yet, it is so many-sided, it seems to spring from so many different sources, to have caught so many different lights; it is so like what it ought to be, so unlike what it might have been, that all other feelings seem at first lost in wonder. It is beyond all things wonderful.

It has so many aspects.

It is a great work of art; it is a carefully prepared scheme of instruction in the articles of the Christian Faith; it is an expression of profound devotion, divine service of the highest kind.

It has so many sources.

First of all, it carries with it the dignity and the seriousness, much of the character, of the old Greek religious drama, the employment, and, in a great measure, the function of the chorus; the calm and solemn movement; the decency, dignity and propriety of the representation; the grace of attitude and gesture; the arrangement of the scenery; the length and shallowness of the great stage, recall the conditions and the character of Athenian tragedy: how far impressed upon it by one classically trained mind, and how far traditional, it is impossible to say.

But these classic forms exist in modern Germany, in the country of great historical frescoes, of a theatre where stage-management

and grouping have been brought to high perfection. This is the land of Munich glass, of Overbeck's sweet and graceful conceptions of the very scenes now brought before us. Germany was the country of Albert Dürer ; this particular part of Germany is now the country of a form of religious art which seems to be inspired either by the ideas of the Renaissance adapted to a French plum-box, or by the frightful realism of the early German artists—blood, tears and physical suffering.

We see in the Passion Drama the power of grouping on a large scale, and of marshalling with grace and order innumerable numbers of figures ; its colouring, on the other hand, is the crude and gaudy colouring of much contemporary German art. Here and there, among figures worthy of a Greek bas-relief, comes an angel in a blue sash and white frock, who might have come straight out of the nearest village church. There is all the reverence of Overbeck, but, though there is the strength and earnestness of Dürer, there is none of his realism.

So much for the work of art. As a scheme of religious instruction, the facts of Scripture history and their typical interpretation are displayed as in the best of class-books ; while, in the hymns of the chorus, we find the whole body of evangelical teaching, which here, in the bosom of the Catholic Church, cannot have sprung from the Reformation, but out of which, surely, the Reformation sprang.

And the story, treated with such splendid art and also with so didactic an aim, is in itself the deepest tragedy, the most dramatic plot ever conceived. Such a one was never offered to classic art, and romantic art has stretched all its powers in trying to treat it worthily.

But it is not only fine art, useful teaching, or entertaining story that fastidious tourist and pious peasant alike look for and alike find. It is the hero who makes the story great, the ideal that makes the art worth conceiving, the subject that makes the lesson good to be taught. The centre of Christian art, of Christian teaching, is Christ Himself, and the centre of the Ober-Ammergau Passion Play is His representative.

It is wonderful that, in a remote German village, the different characteristics of Jew and Roman, high priest and humble disciple, should be so truly thought out and so clearly depicted ; more wonderful that all less worthy additions to the story, all

sentiment less than universal, should have been avoided with such consummate taste ; but the greatest wonder of all is that there should be shown the likeness of One Who spake as never man spake, and Whose ways were not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts.

It is conceivable, the Original being so many-sided, that the Friend of the people, the King in disguise, the patient and dignified Sufferer, might be fitly represented ; but this is the likeness of a Being, not only better and greater than all others, but, as it seems, essentially different. Most of the spectators have always called Him Master and Lord, and now they look and say, "So He is!" They always believed that there walked on earth One who was more than man ; now they realize what the company of such a Being may have been like. They see, not what He was, nor what He felt, for that no art on earth could tell, and these true artists do not try to guess, but what He seemed and how He was loved. This is the object of the Passion Play. This is what all these people have gone out for to see—Jesus of Nazareth—the King of the Jews. They have beheld the Man, in fashion as He lived.

And surely if the divine blessing ever rests on any honest attempt to set forth His glory, it cannot be absent from this effort of the Ammergau villagers to "show the Lord's death" to the modern world.

Spoiled by the great audience, by the elaborated conditions, by the wonderful success? No. Tried indeed as by fire, promoted to work of which the first inventors never dreamed, exposed to a thousand dangers, the messengers deliver their great message still.

The once simple village may look like a World's Fair, its streets may be crowded with carriages and resound with strange tongues, the travellers may struggle for places and need all kinds of modern and unpicturesque contrivances to supply their necessities, Cook's green and yellow tickets may flutter in the air, and waiters "in white ties" may serve food exactly like what a Munich hotel would offer, photographs and autographs may be in demand—all these conditions are inevitable.

They are as nothing, for in 1890, in the crowded streets, as in 1850 in the lonely village, still "He is there in the midst of them."

## The Mystery of M. Felix.

By B. L. FARJEON,

Author of "GREAT PORTER SQUARE," "DEVLIN THE BARBER," "A YOUNG GIRL'S LIFE," "THE DUCHESS OF ROSEMARY LANE,"  
"TOILERS OF BABYLON," etc.

Book the Third.

WHAT BECAME OF M. FELIX.

### CHAPTER LII.

#### THE GHOST OF M. FELIX.

SHE put her hand on my arm as if for protection as she uttered these words, and I took it in mine to reassure her ; it was cold as ice. It was clear that she had received a shock, and I was disposed to ascribe it to the strain she had undergone during the past fortnight. But this view was shaken when I thought of her courage and daring,

"What did I tell you ?" said Bob, sticking to his guns. "Night-mare."

"That's somethink yer must be in bed to 'ave, ain't it?" said Sophy.

"Yes," said Bob, "and asleep."

"I wasn't neither," said Sophy ; "I was as wide awake as you are."

"O, you didn't go to bed when I put you in your room?"

"No, I didn't. I waited a minute or two, and then I went out."

"What made you do that, Sophy?" I asked.

"I don't know, 'xcep' that I wanted to go to the mad'ouse—outside, yer know—to see if they'd found out about the desk."

"It was a dangerous thing to do," I said.

"Well, I didn't do it. I 'adn't got 'arf way there when a sperrit crep' past me! I told aunty I didn't believe in sperrits, but I do now. I didn't think it was a sperrit at fust. I thought it was a man ; and I sed to myself, 'If you can creep, so can I,' and I crep' after it."

"But why, Sophy?"

"I don't know why. I did it 'cause somethink made me. All at once it stopped and turned, and the moon lit up its face. It was the ghost of Mr. Felix!"

She was speaking more quietly now, and there was a note of conviction in her voice that startled me.

"Is that what you call a nightmare?" she asked of Bob, whose eyes were fixed intently upon her.

"No," he replied, "but you were mistaken. It was only a fancied resemblance."

"It wasn't nothink of the sort, and I wasn't mistook. I'm ready to take my dying oath on it. There ain't two Mr. Felixes, there's only one, and it was 'is ghost I sor."

"What did you do, Sophy?" I inquired.

"I stood like a stone, and couldn't move. But when it looked at me, and when I 'eered its voice, and when I sor it moving up to me, I give a scream, and run away. But I fell down over the stump of a tree, and it caught 'old of me and lifted me up. Then it wrenched my face to the light, and poked its 'ead for'ard, and I sor clearer than ever that it was Mr. Felix's ghost. I don't know 'ow I managed it, but I twisted myself away, and run as I never run in my life before, till I got 'ere."

"Is that all, Sophy?"

"That's all I can tell yer. Ain't it enough?"

"If there is any truth in it, my girl, it is more than enough. You cannot say whether it followed you?"

"No, I never looked behind. It was more than I dared do."

"You heard it speak, you say. What words did it utter?"

"It said, 'What the devil!'"

"Nothing more?"

"Nothink as I 'eerd."

She had told all she knew, and it was useless to question her farther upon the subject, so I put it aside for a moment, with the intention of talking it over with Bob when we were alone. But I had not yet done with Sophy; before I parted with her for the night I was desirous of obtaining fuller information of Dr. Peterssen's establishment than she had given Bob. She was perfectly willing to tell everything she knew, and seemed to be relieved to have her attention turned to other matters.

"You had the run of Dr. Peterssen's house, Sophy?"

Yes, I 'ad."

How many servants are there in it?"

"Only one—the keeper."

"What is his name?"

"Crawley."

"Did no woman come to do the cleaning or cooking?"

"Nobody come. Crawley did everythink."

"You were not ill-treated?"

"O, no."

"Did you have your meals alone?"

"No; the three of us 'ad 'em together."

"The three of you. Dr. Peterssen, Crawley, and you?"

"No, Dr. Peterssen never 'ad nothink with us. I mean the other patient."

"But there was more than one?"

"There wasn't while I was there. There was only one."

I turned to Bob. "You said there were children, Bob?"

"So I was informed, but I may have been misled."

"I 'eerd Crawley say the young 'uns was took away the day before I come," said Sophy.

"That explains it. So there was only one patient left?"

"Only one."

"A man?"

"A gentleman."

"How did you find out he was a gentleman?"

"Yer can't be mistook between a man and a gent. You're a gent; Mr. Tucker's another."

"Much obliged," said Bob.

"What is the name of the gentleman patient, Sophy?"

"He didn't 'ave none that I know of. I 'eerd the greengrocer's boy say to Crawley once, 'Ow's Number One, Mr. Crawley?' That's how I got to know 'ow he was called, and what the keeper's name was. I couldn't arks nothink, of course, 'cause I was deaf and dumb. 'Same as ever,' said Crawley to the boy, 'mem'ry quite gone.'"

"Poor fellow! There is no doubt, I suppose, about his being mad?"

"I don't know about that. He never did nothink, and 'ardly ever spoke a word. But he was very kind to me, and I was very sorry for 'im. He'd put 'is 'and on my 'ead, and smooth my 'air,

and look at me pitiful like, with tears in 'is eyes which made 'em come into mine."

"A case of melancholia, Bob," I said. Bob nodded. "Was no effort made, Sophy, to bring his memory back to him?"

"Nobody did nothink; he was let alone, the same as I was. I did want 'ard to talk to 'im, but I didn't dare open my lips, or I should 'ave been found out. I do wish somethink could be done for 'im, that I do. Look 'ere, you're rich, ain't yer?"

"Not exactly rich, Sophy, but I am not poor."

"Well, then. Crawley's to be bought."

"How do you know that?"

"I 'eerd Crawley say to 'isself, 'If I 'ad a 'underd pound I'd cut the cussed concern, and go to Amerikey.'"

"Ah! We'll think over it. A hundred pounds is a large sum. It's late, Sophy. I've nothing more to ask you to-night. Get to bed, like a good girl."

But Sophy began to tremble again; her thoughts reverted to M. Felix.

"I daren't go to the room Mr. Tucker took me to; Mr. Felix's ghost 'd come agin. Let me sleep 'ere, please."

"There's no bed, my girl. I tell you what you shall do. There are two beds in the next room—see, this door opens into it—which Mr. Tucker and I were to occupy. We'll bring a mattress and some bed-clothes in here, and we'll manage for the night; I'll lie on the sofa. You shall sleep in there, where no ghost can get to you. It would have to come through this room first."

Sophy busied herself at once in bringing the mattress and bed-clothes from the adjoining room, and after extemporising a couple of beds for Bob and me, wished us a grateful good-night.

Bob and I were alone. "Now, Bob," said I, "what do you think of her story?"

"There's more in it than meets the eye," said Bob. "Agnold, if any other person had related it I should set it down to an overwrought mind. But Sophy is an exceptional being; she is sharp, she is clever, she is brave, she is clear-witted. Naturally it is a puzzling affair, and I think it is worth arguing out."

"Let us do so, Bob," I said.

"It is always a mistake," said Bob, "in matters of conjecture, to pin oneself to a fixed point. This mistake, in my opinion,



has been committed in all inquiries relating to the Mystery of M. Felix. Having accepted a certain conclusion every person privately or professionally interested in the mystery started from that fixed point and branched out in all directions, north, east, south, and west, utterly ignoring the possibility—in this case I should say the probability—of the conclusion they accepted being a false one, as misleading as a will o' the wisp."

"Am I included in this sweeping condemnation?" I asked.

"You are. The police I can excuse, but not a man of your discrimination and logical power."

"What fixed point, Bob, did I, in common with every one else, start from in wild directions?"

"The fixed point," replied Bob, "that M. Felix is dead."

"But he was proved to be dead."

"Nothing of the sort. There was no post-mortem, there was not even an inquest. He is said to have died of heart-disease. He lies inanimate on a bed for an inconsiderable number of hours, and then he disappears. My dear Agnold, have you ever heard of such a thing as suspended animation?"

"Of course I have."

"Have you ever heard of a person falling into a trance, and remaining to all appearance dead for three or four times as many hours as M. Felix lay before he disappeared? People have been buried alive in such conditions; others have been happily rescued at the moment the lids of their coffins have been about to be nailed down. I can furnish you with scores of instances of this kind of thing."

"There is no need; I know that they have occurred. Your theory opens out a wide field of possibilities. Then you believe that Sophy was right, that she did see, not M. Felix's ghost as she supposed, but M. Felix himself in the flesh?"

"It is my belief. Sophy is no fool; she has the nerve of a strong and healthy man; she does not believe in the supernatural; she has a heart susceptible of such kindness as you have shown her; but she is at the same time practical and hard-headed. Agnold, M. Felix is alive and kicking."

"Do you argue that he simulated death in the first instance for the purpose of carrying out some plan?"

"No. His apparent death was not a trick devised by himself. He had a seizure undoubtedly, to which he was compelled to

succumb. After a time he recovered, and for his own ends resolved to take advantage of the opportunity to disappear, whether permanently or not I cannot say. He had a perfect right to do as he pleased with his own body, and he had good reasons for the device. He was threatened on two sides. Choosing for certain motives to drop his proper name of Leonard Paget and to adopt that of M. Felix, he finds himself suddenly standing on a rock with a precipice yawning on each side of him. A bold movement on the part of his sister-in-law hurls him into one ; a desperate movement on the part of Dr. Peterssen hurls him over the other—either way, destruction. Of the special power which Dr. Peterssen holds over him I am ignorant, but it must be very potent. We are acquainted, however, with the power his sister-in-law holds over him. Her marriage proved, his life has been one long fraud, and he could be made to pay the penalty. Her unexpected presence in London confounds him, and he sees before him but one means of escape—flight. On the night of his supposed death he has had two agitating interviews, one with Dr. Peterssen, the other with his sister-in-law. She, waiting in the street to obtain an interview with M. Felix, overhears words which unmistakably prove that Peterssen has him at his mercy. Peterssen threatens to ruin M. Felix ; he refers to a pleasant partnership in Switzerland nineteen years ago ; he asks M. Felix if he has forgotten his brother Gerald. Then he goes into the house with this precious Felix, and when he issues from it he has in his possession the desk which is now on the table before us. After that, the lady in whose behalf we have been working obtains admission to the house and confronts the villain who has ruined her happiness. We know what passed between them ; we know that M. Felix was worked up to desperation. The excitement was too much for the plausible scoundrel, who saw the sword about to fall upon him. He staggers into his bedroom with the undoubted intention of getting his revolver ; he presses his hand to his heart ; he sinks into a chair and becomes insensible. He is to all appearance dead, and is so pronounced. On the following night when he recovers his senses, he hails the mishap as a fortunate chance ; he resolves to disappear, and so put his enemies off the scent. Now, follow me. Sophy is below in bed. She hears a noise in the upper part of the house ; the brave girl creeps upstairs from the basement as M. Felix creeps downstairs from his

apartments. He dare not betray himself. He seizes her, disguises his voice, and works upon her fears. Exit M. Felix ; for as long or as short a time as he pleases, he is dead to the world. It is a wonder he does not take his revolver with him, but that is an oversight. In such a crisis one cannot think of everything. It may happen—for there is work for us to do, Agnold—that this oversight will work in our favour. I do not despair of tracing the revolver, and you did a good stroke when you wrote down such a description of the weapon as will enable you to identify it. There is no room for doubt that the man who presented himself to Mrs. Middlemore as a police official and who sent her on a false errand to Bow Street Police Station was Peterssen. Alone in M. Felix's room he appropriates the revolver ; other things as well, perhaps ; but of the revolver we are morally convinced. What is his object in going there ? I will tell you. He has doubts of M. Felix's death ; he believes it to be a trick, and he thinks he may find something in M. Felix's rooms which will put him on the track of the man who had slipped out of his power. Reasoning the mystery out in this open way is very satisfactory. Mists disappear ; we see the light. How does it strike you ? ”

“ You have convinced me, Bob,” I said. “ We will pursue the matter a little further. M. Felix is a man who is fond of pleasures which can be purchased only with money. Do you think he would voluntarily deprive himself of the means of obtaining it—for this is what his disappearance would lead him to, so long as he chose to conceal himself ? ”

“ Not at all likely,” replied Bob, with a knowing look. “ I can enlighten you on the point. It happens that I am acquainted with the manager of the branch bank at which M. Felix kept an account. After you had enlisted me in the present cause I became interested in everything concerning M. Felix, and in a confidential conversation with the bank manager I asked him whether M. Felix had a large balance standing to his credit. I learnt that he never had a large balance at the bank, and that he had certain bonds and shares of which he himself was the custodian. Ordinarily one intrusts such securities to the safe custody of the bank which transacts his business, but it was not so with M. Felix, and this fact leads to the presumption that it was his habit to keep himself personally possessed of negotiable property in preference to intrusting it to other keeping. From

time to time cheques from stockbrokers were paid in to the credit of M. Felix. In every instance the money was not allowed to lie in the bank for longer than a day or two. M. Felix invariably drew his own cheque for something near the amount of the last deposit, receiving payment in gold and bank notes. Two days before his supposed death a cheque for six thousand pounds odd was paid in to his credit, and on the following morning he went to the bank and drew out six thousand pounds in notes of various denominations, the numbers of which of course are known. Thus, unless he paid this money away, which is not at all likely, he must have been in possession of it when he disappeared. I am of the opinion that he had much more than the amount I have named, and if so he was well provided for. The peculiar position in which he stood would predispose him to keep always by him a large available sum of money in case of some emergency arising; an emergency did arise, and he could snap his fingers at the world, so far as money was concerned."

"This is a piece of valuable information, Bob. Do you know if any of these last bank notes have been presented for payment?"

"I do not. There was nothing to call for special investigation into the matter."

"But the notes can be traced."

"Perhaps. The habit of a man to keep large sums by him is generally of long standing, and Peterssen was probably acquainted with M. Felix's peculiarity in this respect. The visit he paid to Mrs. Middlemore and the plan he carried into effect for being left alone in the house may have been inspired by the hope that he would discover one of M. Felix's hiding-places for his money. I conclude that he was disappointed; on the night of M. Felix's disappearance he left no money behind him. Too old a bird for that."

The earnestness with which Bob had set forth his views had caused him to forget his cultivated method of speaking in short sentences. Now he relapsed into it.

"Adopting your theory," I said, "that M. Felix is living, do you think that he and Dr. Peterssen have met?"

"Should say not. To-night—when Sophy saw his ghost—was probably on his way to Tylney House. For what purpose, to us unknown."

"Bob, you said there was work for us to do. I confess myself at a loss how to proceed. M. Bordier's visit to you and his appropriation of the document hidden in the secret drawer have snapped the threads of my plans. Have you anything to suggest?"

"I have. Early to-morrow morning endeavour to find M. Bordier. Then consult with him."

"You do not propose that we should leave this spot at once?"

"No. If M. Bordier not in the village, do something else before leaving. Pay a bold visit to Tylney House."

"For what purpose?"

"Confront Peterssen. Ascertain if M. Felix has been there."

"Psha! We can get nothing of Peterssen."

"Not so sure. He is hard up. Offer of a good reward too tempting a bait not to nibble at."

"Why, Bob, those are very nearly the words M. Bordier used to Emilia, and your scheme is the same as that which he suggested."

"Proves it a good one. M. Bordier a wealthy man, I judge?"

"He is."

"Wouldn't mind expending money to bring matter to a satisfactory conclusion?"

"He has said as much."

"Word to be depended upon?"

"Thoroughly."

"Depend upon him, then, for the needful. Peterssen will bite."

"And if he does not?"

"Crawley, the keeper. Remember what Sophy overheard him say. If he had a hundred pounds he would cut the cursed concern, and go to America. Emphatic—and doubtless true. Two birds to shoot at. Peterssen missed, Crawley remains. Aim well, bring him down."

"To-morrow morning, early, we will resume work, Bob."

"The earlier the better. Good night."

## CHAPTER LIII.

### THE PORTRAIT OF GERALD PAGET.

AT nine o'clock next morning Bob, Sophy, and I breakfasted together. Sophy's fears were abated, although she had not

quite got over her fright. During breakfast I succeeded in dispelling it completely by imparting to her, in confidence, the opinion we had formed that M. Felix was alive, and that it was his veritable self, and not his ghost, she had seen on the previous night. She listened with her mouth and eyes wide open.

"You heard him speak, Sophy?" She nodded. "Ghosts can't speak. He caught hold of you; he lifted you up; you felt his touch?" She nodded again. "Ghosts can't touch; they can't make you feel them; they are made of air, Sophy; you can walk right through them. Be easy in your mind. If it *was* M. Felix you saw"—she nodded again too or three times—"then he is alive, and we intend to hunt him down."

I gave her time to revolve the matter over in her mind, and conversed with Bob while she went through the process.

"Crikey!" she exclaimed presently. "What a game it is! Then it must 'ave been 'im as scared me in the night when I left aunty asleep in the kitcheng. I never could make out 'ow it was he knew 'is way about in the dark as he did. He's a deep 'un, he is, and no mistake. Well, of all the moves! But what did he do it for?"

"It would take too long to explain," I said, "and then you might not understand. We are going out soon, and you may as well come with us. It would not be safe, perhaps, to leave you here alone."

Bob and I had debated the advisability of sending Sophy back to London, and had agreed to keep her with us, at least for a time, as there was a likelihood of her being useful.

Our first task when we sallied forth was to endeavour to obtain some information of M. Bordier, but in this we were unsuccessful. Not a person of whom we inquired could give us the slightest satisfaction, and we were reluctantly compelled to abandon our quest. I discussed with Bob whether I should write an account of what had occurred to Emilia, and we decided I should not do so. It would take too long to give her a description of all the circumstances, and anything short of a full description would only agitate her. Then, in all probability, M. Bordier had returned to London, and had seen her. I despatched a telegram to her to the effect that if she had anything of importance to communicate to us she had better do so by telegraph. This done we walked to Tylney House. Our search for M.

Bordier had occupied us three or four hours, and when we reached the gloomy looking building it was two o'clock. To our surprise; the gate was open. Without hesitation we entered the grounds, and there we saw a van, and three men piling furniture on it. This furniture was of the commonest kind, and the men appeared to be in a hurry. We looked at each other in amazement. What did it all mean?

"A break up, I should say," suggested Bob. "Peterssen giving up business."

"There's Crawley the keeper," whispered Sophy, pulling my coat.

The man had lounged from the house, and was regarding the removal of the furniture with dissatisfaction. Bob stepped to his side and we followed.

"Hallo, Maria," said Crawley; "you've been up to some fine tricks, you have. But I'm hanged if I can make head or tail of it." Bob motioned to Sophy not to speak. "Have you two gentlemen come on business?" continued Crawley. "Well, you've come too late. The brokers are in, and we're sold up."

"Then we cannot see Dr. Peterssen?" I said.

"No, you can't," replied Crawley. "He's gone for good."

"I owe you," said Bob, in a bland voice, "ten shillings. Here's the money. Do you want to earn a ten-pound note, which might swell into fifty? There's a gentleman friend of ours who would stand that, and more perhaps, for services rendered."

"What kind of services?" inquired Crawley, pocketing the ten shillings.

"Information. Truthful and accurate information. The ten-pound note sure. That much we guarantee, and wouldn't mind giving half on account. The fifty pound almost as sure. Here, let me speak to you aside."

They walked a little way from us, and I did not interrupt their conversation, which lasted some twenty minutes. At the end of that time Bob left Crawley to say a few words to me.

"Go back to the inn," he said, "you and Sophy, and wait for me. Will join you there in an hour or so. Crawley and I going to have a drink."

I obeyed him without wasting time in asking questions, and Sophy and I returned to the inn. It was a disappointment that



a telegram from Emilia had not arrived. But before Bob made his appearance an incident occurred which profoundly agitated me. I was sitting at the table, making, as was usual with me, a record of what had happened, in the doing of which I had occasion to take some papers from my pockets. Among these papers which I placed on the table was the photograph of Gerald Paget which I had found in M. Felix's room, his name being written on the back. While I wrote Sophy remained quiet. The girl has a discretion; she knows when to speak and when to hold her tongue. My writing done, I took up the papers to put them in my pocket, and in doing so, the photograph dropped to the ground. Sophy stooped and picked it up, and was about to give it to me, when her eyes fell on it.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "If it ain't the pickcher of Number One!"

"What?" I cried.

"It is," she said, looking at it with absolute tenderness. "It's the image of 'im, though he's older now than when it was took; but it's 'is face as clear as clear can be."

"Sophy," I said, rising in my excitement, "are you mad? Do you know what you are saying?"

"'Course I do. It's Number One, I tell yer. I'll take my Bible oath on it!"

"You must be dreaming," I said. "This is the portrait of a gentleman who died many years ago."

"If he's dead," she persisted, "he's come to life agin, like Mr. Felix. It's Number One's pickcher, and nobody else's."

She was so positive that I was confounded by the possibilities her statement opened up, supposing her not to be mistaken. Nothing that I said could shake her conviction.

"I know 'is face as well as I know your'n," she said. "I can't be mistook. It's the pickcher of Number One."

At this junction Bob entered the room. Anxious as I was to hear his news I first explained the incident to him, and it was an additional surprise to me when he ranged himself on Sophy's side.

"I accept everything," he said. "No villainy too monstrous for Peterssen. Corroborative evidence handy. Crawley!"

The man was outside in the passage, and at the summons he came in.

"Know this portrait?" asked Bob, handing it to him.

Crawley looked at the portrait, then looked at us, and said hesitatingly, "It's something like Number One. How did you get hold of it?"

"Never mind. Are you positive it is his portrait?"

"It's a bit like him, that's all I can say."

"That will do. Go and get something to eat, and be ready when I call you. Mind, no drinking."

Crawley gone, Bob turned his attention to me.

"Before I tell you arrangements entered into with Crawley, finish about this picture. Sophy says, portrait of Number One. Crawley a little doubtful. I believe it—name of Gerald Paget back of picture. Deduction—portrait of Gerald Paget. Further deduction—Number One and Gerald Paget same person. Startling—but Peterssen and M. Felix damned scoundrels, pair of them. No villainy too monstrous for them. In circumstance of Number One and Gerald Paget being same person, lies solution of Peterssen's power over M. Felix. What does lady we are working for overhear? Overhears Peterssen threaten to ruin M. Felix. Overhears him refer to a pleasant partnership in Switzerland nineteen years ago. Overhears him ask M. Felix if he has forgotten his brother Gerald. Not idle words. On the contrary. deeply, darkly significant. To my mind, quite clear—and convincing. Splendid links of circumstantial evidence. Gerald Paget alive instead of dead, additional reason for M. Felix's disappearance. Threatened not on two sides, but on three. Peterssen—Gerald Paget—Gerald Paget's wife. Desperate fix for M. Felix. Your opinion, Agnold?"

"Coincides with yours, Bob. Light is truly breaking in upon this mystery."

"Right you are. Now to explain Crawley. Have taken him in our service—for one month, certain—thirty shillings a week. Matters brought to satisfactory conclusion, promise of passage to America, with few pounds in his pocket. No doubt M. Bordier will do what we wish, and indemnify us. If not, won't ruin us. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"I come now to Peterssen and Tylney House. Briefly. Things been going wrong for some time past. Peterssen in pecuniary difficulties. Dunned on all sides for money owing.

Tradesmen threaten to stop supplies. Last night, Peterssen in frightful rage. Door of private room locked. Key missing. Door forced open. Something stolen from room. Crawley doesn't know what. We do. Sophy, otherwise Maria, nowhere to be found. Row between Peterssen and Crawley. Peterssen accuses Crawley of treachery. Crawley calls him another. At midnight Crawley hears bell ring. Peterssen answers it—admits visitor. Crawley doesn't see him. Visitor sleeps there—is there this morning—but Crawley can't catch sight of him. Keeps himself dark. Crawley sent on bogus errand. Occupies him three hours. Returns to find visitor gone, Peterssen gone, Number One gone. Note left for Crawley from his master. Concern burst up. In note, small sum for wages due. Not half what is due. Crawley furious, but helpless. I have enlisted him. He is to assist us to track Peterssen. That's all."

"Bob," said I, "Peterssen must be hunted down and brought to justice."

"He must," said Bob, "and shall be."

"There is some fresh villainy hatching," I said. "If possible we must prevent it. You will stand by me?"

"To the end," said Bob.

## CHAPTER LIV.

### I OBTAIN AN EXPLANATION FROM EMILIA.

IT was now between five and six o'clock, and we did not wait for the night to pass before we commenced the task of hunting Dr. Peterssen down. The immediate result, however, was unsatisfactory. Indefatigable as we were we learnt nothing, and Crawley proved to be rather in our way than otherwise. Dr. Peterssen's movements must have been cunningly made indeed to so completely baffle us. We went to the railway station, but the station-master was positive that three such men as we described had not taken tickets for any place during the day. He could have identified Dr. Peterssen; of Peterssen's patient or of M. Felix he had no knowledge.

"There isn't much traffic here," he said, "and we know pretty well who comes and goes."

'But strangers sometimes pass through," I observed.

"That goes without saying," he responded.

"They might have travelled separately," suggested Bob.

"They might," said the station-master.

"It is hardly likely," I said aside to Bob, "that this would be the case. If Peterssen and M. Felix have come together again, Peterssen would not lose sight of his villainous partner; and neither of them would lose sight of the gentleman they have wronged."

I consulted the time-table. There was no other direct train to London that night, but a train passed through without stopping at 11.40. I inquired of the station-master whether it was possible for the train to stop a few seconds to take me up to London, and he answered that it could be managed. Having arranged the matter with him I left the station, accompanied by Bob and Sophy. Crawley lingered behind; he had a flask with him, out of which he took frequent drinks. I had already arrived at the conclusion that he would be of little assistance in tracking Dr. Peterssen, but as his evidence might be valuable in the event of our hunting Peterssen down I thought it advisable to keep him about us.

"What is your idea?" asked Bob, as we walked from the station to the inn.

"If I do not receive a satisfactory letter or telegram from London before eleven o'clock," I replied, "I shall go on to London to see Emilia."

"For what purpose?"

"To gain some information of M. Bordier. Something may come of it—I cannot say what; but to remain inactive would be fatal to our chances."

"Peterssen has a good start of us," said Bob. "He has given us check."

"But not checkmate, Bob. I have hopes that it remains with us to score the game."

Neither telegram nor letter had arrived for me at the inn, and at a little after eleven I was at the station, awaiting the train. It was punctual to time, and stopped just long enough to enable me to jump in. Then we whirled on to London, which we reached at three o'clock in the morning. At such an hour a visit to Emilia was out of the question, and I had perforce to bide till morning. The delay gave me opportunity for a few hours' sleep, and at nine o'clock I was in the presence of Emilia. I observed

a change in her. Her eyes were brighter, and there was a certain joyousness in her manner which I was glad to see.

"You have had good news," I said.

"I have," she replied, "the best of good news. But what brings you again to London so unexpectedly, dear friend?"

I thought of the secret in my possession which identified Dr. Peterssen's patient, Number One, as Gerald Paget, whom she had mourned as dead for nineteen years. But I did not dare to whisper it to her lest I should inspire delusive hopes. The proof had yet to be established, and until this was done it would be best and most merciful to preserve silence.

"I come entirely upon your business," I said, "and I wish to get back at once."

"How good you are to me!" she murmured. "Never, never can I repay you for all your kindness."

"We will not speak of that. But you can give me some return now. I think I may truly say that I deserve your confidence."

"Indeed, indeed you do."

"I sent you a telegram yesterday."

"Yes, I received it."

"I expected one from you."

"I am sorry," she said, "but I had nothing to communicate, and M. Bordier desired me neither to write nor telegraph to any one till he saw me. I was bound to obey him with so much at stake."

"Yes, I understand all that. He is aware that I am a reporter on a newspaper, and he fears I shall make improper use of information. I cannot blame him, but he is mistaken. Did not M. Bordier return to London yesterday?"

"No."

"He gave you instructions, then, by letter?"

"By letter and telegrams."

She took from her pocket a letter, and two telegrams in their familiar buff-coloured envelopes, and, after a little hesitation, handed me the latter.

"I cannot think I am doing wrong in letting you see them," she said.

The first telegram ran: "I have good news, the best of news. Keep a good heart. Julian unites with me in love to you and Constance."

"His son is with him?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Poor Julian!"

In my last interview with her, two days since, she had referred to Julian Bordier in the same pitying tone. I had not time then to ask for an explanation, and I had not time now. The moments were too precious to waste in questions which did not bear immediately upon the matter in hand. I read the second telegram: "We may be absent a day or two. Meanwhile send no letters or telegrams to any person whatsoever. I particularly desire to avoid publicity of any kind. To Mr. Agnold, who has so generously and kindly befriended you, I will give a full explanation when we meet. Our united love."

For a moment or two I was nettled, but I very soon got over the small feeling. Had I been present when M. Bordier surprised Bob Tucker in the inn and found the document in the secret drawer of the desk, he would doubtless have taken me into his confidence. It was natural that he should look upon Bob in a different light, for the probable reason that he supposed him to be a professional detective.

"M. Bordier," said Emilia, "repeats the injunction in his letter. I could not but obey him."

She read from the letter words to the same effect as the second telegram.

"You infer," I said, "from these communications that M. Bordier places no obstacles in the way of your daughter's union with his son?"

"Yes," she replied; "it is my happy belief. My heart is lighter than it has been for months. I have endured what seemed to me an eternity of sorrow, but that has passed, and Heaven's light is shining upon my life."

She was transfigured. There was indeed a heavenly light in her eyes, and her manner was that of one who had been raised from deepest woe to supreme happiness.

"I rejoice with you," I said cordially. "Is it a breach of confidence for me to ask from what part of the country M. Bordier has written to you?"

"His letter bears no address," she said.

"Does he give you no information of what he has done and is about to do?"

"None."

"Nor of any discovery that has been made?"

"No."

She looked at me wistfully ; I took her hand. As to certain matters there was on my part no motive for secrecy. Why should I withhold from her even for an hour that which would strengthen the new-born hopes which animated her? To a heart so sorely bruised as hers had been, to one who had borne suffering so sweetly and patiently, it would be cruel to keep back the least word of comfort, and I narrated to her all that had taken place between M. Bordier and Bob. She was greatly excited when I told her of the recovery of the desk, of M. Bordier's search for the secret drawer, and of his subsequent discovery of the hidden document.

"It is the copy of the marriage certificate," she cried.

"That is my impression, and now I can relieve your mind of another matter. It is our firm belief that the man who assumed the name of M. Felix lives."

I gave her our reasons for this belief, and made her acquainted with Bob's theory of the seizure which threw M. Felix into a state of unconsciousness and insensibility, and which was simply pronounced to be death. She was profoundly agitated, and the grateful tears flowed down her face.

"I have been distracted by a horrible fear," she said, "that I was the indirect cause of his death. Surely Heaven sent you to my aid on the night we first met. Without you I should not have dared to move, and indeed whatever steps I might have taken must have proved futile. Through you and your friends, Dr. Peterssen is unmasked, and my honour established. How I long to embrace that brave girl, Sophy ! No reward can be too great for her, and M. Bordier, I am sure, will do all in his power to advance her. Dear friend, dear friend ! My words are weak—my heart is full."

She pressed my hand and promised to let me know everything upon M. Bordier's return. I did not tell her why I was anxious to return to the village with as little delay as possible, but I incidentally showed her the photograph which I had found in M. Felix's rooms. Her tears bedewed it ; she kissed it again and again.

"It is my dear husband's portrait," she sobbed. "His name is in his own handwriting. Dear Gerald ! They would have had



me believe you false. Heaven forgive them for their treachery to you, to me!"

She begged me to leave the picture with her, but I was compelled to refuse; I needed it to track Dr. Peterssen and his patient. Of course I kept my reasons to myself, and I promised her that I would only retain the portrait a short time, and that it should soon be hers.

"I do not exactly know," I said, "where I shall be during the next few days; I may be travelling from place to place, but I shall continue to telegraph to you wherever I am, in order that you may communicate with me."

"But why do you go away again?" she asked; "you have discovered what you wished; nothing more remains to be done."

If she but knew, I thought, how different would be her desire—how she would entreat me to fly, how she would implore and urge me on!

"Much remains to be done," I said. "Dr. Peterssen must be found; he must not be allowed to escape."

"Leave him to Heaven's justice," she said.

"That will overtake him; but man's justice shall also be meted out to him. Would you leave Leonard Paget also in peace?"

"I would," she replied.

"He has squandered your fortune, but there may be some small portion left. It must be recovered; it will serve as your daughter's dowry."

"She needs none. M. Bordier and Julian will be content to take her as she is; and for me—has not happiness shone upon me in the darkest hour of my life? Let both those men go their way."

"No," I said firmly, "my mission is not yet ended, and you, if you knew all, would not seek to restrain me."

She looked at me questioningly, and I accounted for my rash remark by saying, "There are public as well as private duties, my dear madam, and I should be false to my trust if I neglected the one for the other. I should like to shake hands with your daughter before I go."

She went from the room and returned with Constance, who received me cordially. As they stood side by side, their lovely countenances irradiated by thoughts of the bright future in

store for them, I was glad to know that I had had some small share in their better fortune.

"It is something to have done," I said to myself as I hastened to the station, "to have assisted to bring joy to the hearts of two good women ; this in itself is ample reward. Then, old fellow, you have gained two earnest and sincere friends. One of these fine days you shall go to Switzerland, and be witness of the happiness to which you have contributed. And if you can restore to the one a husband, to the other a father——"

I rubbed my hands and stepped on gaily. The mystery of M. Felix had engaged and engrossed me for a considerable time, but I was never more interested in it than I was at the present moment. "I will not desist," thought I, "till the end is reached. A bitter ending for the snarers, a sweet ending for the snared."

*(To be concluded.)*

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## Her Guardian.

WHAT a great deal has been written upon the Worship of the Beautiful—to be sure! And how awfully clever the writers are in expressing their feelings and wrapping up their sentiments in language which is not to be “understood” by a commonplace person like myself. I know there are regular laws laid down for the guidance of the novice, but I have never mastered them, and so am, I presume, liable to be called a Philistine. But though I do not comprehend all this jargon of the “Higher Cult,” yet I very ardently admire the Beautiful—of the opposite and gentler sex.

My conversion dates from the completion of my fifth year, and I still am a devotee at the shrine of female loveliness.

The first divinity whom I adored was a fairy-like sylphide some three summers old. She was the daughter of our coachman, who lived at the lodge gates, and had, if I remember rightly, blue eyes. This attachment was not lasting, for the very first time I appeared in the fashionable world I saw and loved another, a dark-haired little lady who owned to the poetic name of Gladys. It was at a children's party, and I was clad in ruby velvet. She at once evinced a strong admiration for my rosy-hued garments and selected me out for special notice from amongst my more soberly clad compeers. She accompanied me down to supper and much impressed me by her capacity for tipsy cake and trifle. I distinctly remember privately speculating as to whether Gregory's powder or a seidlitz would be her fate next morning—it was before the days of Fruit salt and the like luxuries of advanced civilization. Gladys reigned more or less supreme for two whole years, though I rather fancy that now and then I had short spells of infatuation for other little queens. Perhaps I had yet been her slave, or, who knows, her legal lord and master, if her father, who was a clergyman, had not exchanged his living for one in the South and thus carried my hopes away with him. I got over the wrench, I am bound to say, much sooner than I expected, for our new vicar had four daughters, with all of whom

I fell deeply in love in regular sequence, beginning with the youngest and gradually gaining confidence until I boldly declared my passion for Amy, a buxom brunette of *circa* three and twenty. I threw myself and any prospective fortune at her feet. She did not spurn me, but she gave me no hope, and a month later became engaged to her cousin, a nasty, long-legged brute in a dragoon regiment. This shook my belief in woman for a season, and I fiercely sought distraction in cricket and other manly pursuits.

Time brings solace, and my blighted affections began to revive, and under the influence and sunshine of Maggie Mercer's smiles they not only budded afresh but burst out into full flower.

How I came to fall a victim to Miss Maggie I cannot at this distance of time imagine, for to the best of my recollection her nose was of that order which is politely termed *retroussé*. Her hair was of very ruddy hue, yet I was devoted to her, and distinctly remember fighting Sam Soames because he mockingly followed her, holding one of his arms out at right angles to his body and working the other up and down like a pump handle, whilst a hissing sound from his lips was intended to convey the impression of a jet of water playing on to a fire. I remember too he gave me a good licking, thus reversing the order of things and adding injury to insult. By the time that my left eye, which he had very effectually closed, regained its normal condition, my ardour and admiration for the indirect cause of its discolourment had cooled.

I pass over several other affairs of little moment, which characterized my life at Eton, to tell of a very serious fracture which my perhaps somewhat too susceptible heart sustained whilst I was up at Oxford, and how it placed me in a most embarrassing and humiliating position.

I was in my second year and spending part of the Long with my chum, Bertie Bolitho, whose father has a fine old place down in Yorkshire. There was a houseful of people, and amongst them one with whom I was soon desperately in love. None of your casual flounderings and splashings this time, but a real header, a tremendous plunge!

Effie Beauchamp was a perfect Peri! Tall and stately, with the mien of an empress and the grace of a queen.

She had eyes that made your pulses leap as you gazed into their violet depths, and a smile so witching that it would have

bowled over even St. Dunstan himself. Her hair, which haloed a head to make sculptors delirious with admiration, was a wealth of tangled glittering sunbeams.

That she was a clever, sensible girl was proved by her preferring my society to that of any of the half-dozen men who were staying in the house. Though I don't much fancy that they held to this opinion.

We rode, drove, and played tennis together by day, and strolled about the gardens and shrubberies in the gloaming; and it was under the shadow of a great copper beech in one of these after-dinner strolls that I proposed to her.

Of course I had prepared a neat and impassioned speech beforehand and thoroughly rehearsed the scene in the solitude of my room before the glass door of its wardrobe, and equally of course I never gave it a thought when the critical moment arrived, and its ornate pleadings were never spoken. But it all came right, and before I had got out many disjointed and probably incoherent words, my darling was in my arms.

Oh, the wild rapture of that moment when first I felt her heart beating against my own, and saw the lovelight flash in those glorious eyes as we clung together in silent happiness. Heigho! it is all over long ago, of course, and I have outgrown boyhood's sentimental periods, yet on dreamy summer evenings the sunset breeze sometimes wafts to me the faint scent of her waving hair, and I still seem to feel warm, soft kisses from her quivering lips.

But to come back to grim reality. It was not to be all sunshiny wooing, for Effie was an orphan, and until twenty-five absolutely in the power of an old uncle with whom she lived. When I broached the subject of an "engagement" to her, she gave me to understand that she did not think her guardian would hear of such a thing for a moment, and urged that we should have "an understanding" between us, and keep our love dark till she was her own mistress. As she was only eighteen, it meant that for seven years I must patiently wait like Jacob for his Rachel, and this I considered too wearisome a thing to contemplate. I began to suspect that her uncle was a bit of a Tartar, and she dreaded his knowing of our little attachment, and Bertie Bolitho, whom I took into my counsels, confirmed the suspicion.

"She is a thundering nice girl, Billy, my boy, but old Beauchamp is the very —. A crusty old brute with the worst

temper in Yorkshire. He will never let you have her. Come, I'll lay five to one against it."

This was not reassuring, but I was not going to lose such a prize without a struggle of some sort, and so I told him; and furthermore declared my intention of going at once to beard the avuncular lion in his den.

He laughed as though it was a capital joke.

"My stars, Billy! won't he have you on toast just?"

Bertie is a thoroughly good fellow, but he has an objectionable way of putting things sometimes.

When once my mind is made up, I go through with anything I take in hand. So next morning I was off to interview Mr. Beauchamp.

Ingleby Hall is five miles from Ripon, and thither I was conveyed in a musty fly from the "Unicorn." As I sat and watched the hedgerows slide past, I tried to face out the situation and resolve upon the precise line of action to take; but that nasty remark of Bertie's would drive all other ideas out of my mind, and every hoof-beat of the big bay mare echoed, "Have you on toast! have you on toast!"

As we drove up, each window in the long front of the hall seemed to stare superciliously at me, and the rooks in the swaying elms cawed in a most arrogantly scornful manner. I felt mightily tempted, even as I rang the bell, to bolt back into the frowsy depths of my hired vehicle and bid the slumbrous Jehu drive rapidly away. But a fleeting vision of sapphire-blue eyes nerved me, and I pulled myself together and peremptorily asked the footman who opened the door:

"Is Mr. Beauchamp at home?"

"He is, sir; will you step this way?"

I followed him across the great square hall into what was evidently the library, and then he went off to inform his master that a gentleman wished to see him upon important private business.

I took up a commanding position on the hearthrug so as to front the door, and thus be ready for instant action the moment it opened. But a few minutes of waiting brought back all my quavering feelings tenfold, and I began to wish myself well out of it. A quarter of an hour passed, and still no one came. Oh, Effie, what tortures did I not endure for your sweet sake in that

dismal interval of apprehensive waiting! The suspense to a person of my sensitive nature was most agonizing, and I felt if I did not at once do something I should get out of hand.

Several courses suggested themselves. I might ring the bell, and ask whether the master of Ingleby intended to favour me with an interview, which in the case of a suppliant was, perhaps, a somewhat presumptuous and rash thing to do; or I could open the window, get out on to the terrace, and either regain the friendly shelter of my fly, or else make tracks, steeplechase fashion, across the park, both of which were undignified and cowardly proceedings. No! come what might, I could not turn tail and bolt without showing fight. If "the French Guard dies but never surrenders," it certainly is never possible for an Englishman to retreat. Again I reflected that as the Spartan woman met with scorn the husband who fled from battle, my "lovely beloved" would probably receive me with derision if I ran away from her uncle. Then again I bethought me of Leander, the bold swimmer, and how he nightly braved the cold waters of the Hellespont for an hour or two's spooning with his pretty Hero; and should not I withstand an angry guardian's fume and bluster for a lifetime of love with my bonnie Effie? I had just succeeded in steeling myself with these inspiring thoughts when the door opened, and the enemy and I were face to face.

He was a prim, dapper little gentleman, with a rubicund face, which rose above an old-fashioned stock coiled about his neck in wonderful folds. He had on a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles with very round glasses, which gave him rather the appearance of a contemplative owl, an effect still further enhanced by his round, bald head. He certainly did not look the ferocious old curmudgeon Bertie Bolitho had led me to expect, as he sidled nervously towards me, coughed slightly, and said with a bow:

"Ahem! Good day to you, sir!"

My spirits went up like a rocket as I answered his friendly salutation and noted his meek mien. But they came down like the stick as I realized that bland, seemingly complacent, little men are generally the most dangerous if put out.

"Fine day for the time of year!"

I agreed cordially and he came a few steps nearer.

"May I—er—ask you, sir, to—er——"



Now it was coming, he was going to ask me my name and business of course. So, knowing from experience as stroke of our College boat, the advantage of the start and a smart getting away at the commencement of a race, I anticipated his question.

"My name is William Amour, my father is Member for Dullerton. I have come to see you on a matter of very great moment to myself and to your niece."

His placid, childlike smile was gone in a moment—just as I expected.

"Excuse me, sir, I think you are——"

But I was not going to be chopped in cover, so I plunged on with my declaration, unheeding his interruption.

"I am most deeply and honestly in love with your niece, and I have not only told her so but have heard from her own lips that she loves me in return."

"My dear sir!" ejaculated my listener in tones of amazed horror.

But I felt my only chance was to have out all I had to say before he could get a word in, and so I hurried on.

"I am afraid you will think us both too young, but that objection will lessen every day. A girl at eighteen is a woman in mind, sir. It is not my fault that I am only nineteen, and I shall soon grow out of it. I am not a fool, and if only you will consent to an engagement between us——"

"Stop, stop, sir!"

The little gentleman was growing redder in the face; he was clearly getting very angry. I dashed on.

"If you will only consent to recognize me, even privately, as Effie's *fiancé*, I will be worthy of her. I will work hard—will wait for years, Mr. Beauchamp."

"No, no, sir! I——" cried my enemy positively, shaking his head and throwing up his hands.

But I would not let him stamp upon my hopes. Entreaty had obviously failed. I would be defiant and show him the determined man he had to deal with, so I went on recklessly and savagely.

"I know that until she is twenty-five, Miss Beauchamp cannot marry without your consent. But you cannot control her affections. I have her love and trust, and you cannot force her to give me up. You may try as hard as you like, sir, but I defy

you. I have come and told you all, and you refuse to listen to me. Very well! I tell you boldly I will have Effie in spite of you. I have the honour to bid you good morning."

I cast at him a look, in which I considered haughty scorn and bold defiance were about equally blended, and stalked loftily towards the door.

"Pray, pray, sir," he cried in shrill nervous accents, "allow me to explain. There is a mistake—a most unfortunate one. I am not Mr. Beauchamp, I assure you, sir. My name is Potts, sir—Potts and Sons, watchmakers, Market Place, Ripon, and I have only come to wind up the clock on the mantelpiece!"

At that moment the real Mr. Beauchamp came upon the scene. Over succeeding events I draw a veil. Suffice it to say he fully merited Bertie Bolitho's descriptive epithets, and that he not only had me very unmistakably on toast, but savagely ordered me to hold no further intercourse with his niece and ward.

G. VICKARS-GASKELL.

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## Some Realities of Undergraduate Life.

FEW things are more exasperating to the unphilosophical mind than the tenacity with which the immense majority of us cling to a lie when once it has been thoroughly accepted and popularized. I still remember with amusement my indignation as an undergraduate when my friends implied, as they never failed to do, that my three years at college were simply a three years' enjoyable holiday. It was equally useless to make assertions, or to resort to argument, to point to examinations passed over the heads of other men, to tell how many cases are known in which fellows had utterly broken down under the double strain of brainwork and anxiety, to enumerate the subjects tackled, and the amount and kind of reading which results proved I had done; "undergraduates all have an easy time, a careless time, an enjoyable time, a lazy time:" the falsehood was thoroughly established, and the only feeling I succeeded in arousing was either one of amusement at undergraduate ignorance of what hard work really meant, or of wonder at undergraduate impudence, which expected sensible people to swallow my manifest fictions.

And, nevertheless, looking back on his university life, every man knows that all colleges contain a number of reading men, and that in some few "the reading set" is a very large one.

It would be strange indeed if it were not so, for to many men, or boys, the inducements to read at certain colleges, such as Balliol or King's for instance, are greater than the temptations to idleness.

There are the undergraduates who are physically fit for hard study, but who could never take more than a modest place in athletics; there are the poor sons of poor fathers, who realize the value in money and moneysworth of university distinction; there are the sons of known men, ambitious of treading in their fathers' footsteps, and, lastly, there are the men who love study for its own sake, with as warm and steady an affection as any embryo Herr Professor of the Fatherland.

To such men even comparative idleness offers no temptations which self-respect and self-interest will not easily overcome.

They will either go in for athletics in strict moderation, or from vanity abstain from them altogether ; gambling is comparatively rare, and to the normal youth very unattractive ; of immorality, technically so called, there is little at our university towns, and that little is condemned by undergraduate public opinion, frowned at by college authorities, peculiarly unalluring in form, and not congenial to the tender consciences and healthy bodies of the average young English gentleman.

A good deal of time of course may be wasted in society, but a little of the society of non-reading men, who despise "shop," dislike so-called smugs, and dwell wearisomely on "the boat," so and so's cricket, and topics in which they are at home and the reading man is not, proves sufficient for the average hardworker, who, be it remembered, still has most of the faults of clever boys, that is, who is always a bit of a prig, and while proud of his universal tolerance, is practically as prejudiced and narrow-minded as the average public schoolboy.

It is easy to explain why the presence of a large number of these men at our universities is not apparent to, and therefore disbelieved in by, the outer world ; they themselves contribute in no small measure to this state of things, partly from false shame, partly from the natural prudence which makes a man conceal the fact of his working hard till he can point to tangible results obtained, and partly because a man's reading interests no outsiders except his own "people ;" the working undergraduate, if he talks university "shop" to outsiders at all, gives them what they expect, experiences of his hours of idleness.

So that visitors to Oxford or Cambridge, coming for the brief holiday-season of the summer term, see their host and their host's friends holiday making, and learn scarcely more of the real life of the place than they would learn of the chamber life of barristers by attending the annual flower show in the Inner Temple Gardens.

And lastly, people are apt to believe what they like, and, perhaps, from a touch of envy of university men, or because it is pleasant to think of a lot of light-hearted young fellows passing into manhood through a land where it is always the ideal British schoolboy's ideal afternoon, people like to believe in the healthy fool's paradise view of our universities.

And yet to any one who knows, by having lived among them,

the reading set at a college is an interesting, and even in some respects a cheerful study.

There is plenty of variety in it too. Reading men may be divided into at least five distinct classes, each of which has its sub-divisions.

First in favour and popular university estimation is the all-round man, of whom Robinson, of —, was, in my time, as good an example as any. A fine classic, a fair oar, a fluent talker, generally well informed, never in a hurry, doing everything neatly and easily, from international law to football, and holding rather more than his own at a debating club or in a "bally-rag."

But such men as Robinson are rare, possessing as they must do a very strong brain in a thoroughly healthy body, with judgment and self-restraint to make due use of both.

They are, it is needless to say, universal favourites and models, in which latter respect they do more harm than good, for though it seems easy to imitate their college life, the effort is apt to eventually wreck second-rate men in the schools; I have known many a safe first lost by a man's thinking he could do by straining as many things as Robinson did without any apparent effort.

Far less popular is the reading man of many abilities and exclusive, but varied, intellectual tastes. Such a man was Brown, of — College, who found time for Greek art, mediæval literature, French plays, and editing an undergraduate paper—no great proof of intellectual tastes this last perhaps—while reading steadily for a brilliant first-class:

Undergraduates of the Brown type are the true mental salt of a college, though the salt is apt to be unappreciated by their fellows, partly because most Browns are prigs, and partly because in the search for congenial spirits they are apt to select many of their associates from other colleges, a very serious offence in popular estimation.

Theoretically, indeed, the standard of the duty which a man owes his own college is a high, to some minds an incomprehensibly high, one. To these dissenters from the recognized creed, it does seem that as colleges exist mainly for the benefit of the undergraduate, it is somewhat inconsistent to require the undergraduate to exist exclusively for the benefit of his college, and that when he has paid its bills, observed, or not openly transgressed, its rules, and by his work in the examination room

increased its reputation, he has done enough, and cannot fairly be required to consider its interests by sacrificing his tastes or his leisure in the attempt to raise in an infinitesimal degree that intangible something called a college's moral and intellectual tone.

This at all events is the heresy of men of the Jones and Smith types. Jones was a good specimen of a third class of readers, men who love their work for its own sake and devote themselves wholly to it, neglecting alike physical enjoyment and general culture.

Thus Jones would work steadily nine, or even ten hours a day, term after term, learning French and German in what he called spare time, but learning and using them only for the purpose of his great study, theology, in the widest sense of the word. Yet Jones could appreciate clever conversation or good poetry almost as thoroughly as Brown himself, and has always been a keen and judicious politician; in fact the Joneses of the university are as intellectually many-sided as the Browns; it is not the head but the heart which causes them to devote themselves to one study to the sacrifice of their general knowledge. Whether theirs is the better part, as far as contentment is concerned, seems doubtful, and probably the Browns with less labour reap as many of the material fruits of success.

Smith was a representation of a fourth and altogether inferior class of workers; that class which consists of men of average intellect and normal tastes, who do well, though rarely brilliantly, in the schools by sheer steady work, or, as schoolboys would say, by sapping.

Smith, being a man of no means, unsociable habits, quiet tastes and poor physique, made up his mind when he went to college to take as high a place as might be in the class list; a fellowship, as he soon learnt, was completely out of his reach, even a scholarship was unlikely, but a first-class was reasonably probable provided he chose to pay the cost. For this, therefore, he slaved, giving up all the wider advantages and most of the pleasures of a university career. Having found how many hours a day he could work with a reasonable chance of keeping his health, he worked that number of hours every day through the term, pursuing an invariable routine behind a jealously sported oak, regardless of custom, public opinion, the claims of friendship, or the

duties of the ordinary give-and-take of college life. In the old days of black art, he would probably have endeavoured to sell his soul, or more likely some one else's, for a good degree ; as it was he took a cynical pleasure in the exclusive selfishness of his aims and the persistent egoism with which he pursued them. Needless to say there are very few such men at a college, and that those few are considered, except perhaps by the tutors, too many.

Be that as it may, Smith's college life might have taught one lesson, if new-comers would have learnt it, and that is the advantage an undergraduate gains by an avowed intention of reading hard ; such an intention, once clearly understood and accepted, secures a man from a good many interruptions and temptations to idleness, and it is a pity, alike for themselves and for their juniors, that so many reading men keep up a false and foolish affectation of indolence and leisure.

Nor need the new-comer fear that in entering the ranks of reading men he is renouncing all the pleasures or varieties of university life ; besides the common enjoyments which they may share in, though in strict and somewhat trying moderation, the reading set have one great and never-failing pleasure of their own, that of conversation, and, above all, of that conversation which is argument.

Just as naturally as young athletes engage in friendly but exciting struggles of wind and muscle, so the youngsters who are developing and realizing the strength of their mental muscles engage in friendly but earnest and often-repeated arguments ; and there is a charm in the evenings so spent which a man will never forget, and, unless he be exceptionally fortunate, will never secure a repetition of.

Where indeed, except in your college, can you find a dozen men within one stone's-throw of your bedroom, any one of whom will make you welcome to a cup of tea and a thoroughly enjoyable and improving wrangle ? It is true that such discussions were characterized by crudeness, that many of the conclusions were unsound, most of the arguments faulty, that novelties were asserted to be proved facts and old-established facts paraded as novelties, and that ancient fallacies and obsolete prejudices were dug up and obstinately defended, and that declamation was mistaken for reasoning, while untenable assertions were imposed on



inexperience and ignorance. But how delightful it all was, and, paradoxical as it sounds, how improving!

It was not only that there was plenty of that talking which makes a ready man, but there was a welcoming of new ideas, a boldness of definition, a give-and-take teaching, self-reliance and self-restraint, and, above all, scrupulous courtesy and the widest toleration. For, if all undergraduates are prejudiced and priggish in the ordinary affairs of university life, the reading men are singularly tolerant of political, religious, social and economic heresies, and, which is more rare, equally tolerant of opinions usually regarded as antiquated or even as obsolete.

A believer in the verbal inspiration of the book of Genesis will give his best attention to the doubts of a sceptic as to the traces of design in the universe, and, more extraordinary still, a supporter of all the most radical theories known to the nineteenth century will carefully weigh the merits of an argument in favour of the divine right of kings.

In short, provided a man will keep his temper and treat his opponent as he likes to be treated himself, he is welcome to advance any opinion so long as it is neither blasphemous towards the Deity nor personally disrespectful to the reigning sovereign.

There is of course a danger in all this freedom, but there are also two immense benefits. A man, at the most impressionable age, learns to despise that superstitious awe of the opinion of a majority simply because it is the opinion of a majority, which is one great curse of our present age, and he also learns, while battling fearlessly for his own opinions, to treat with the most punctilious courtesy and fairness the men who are making the most telling attacks on his cherished convictions or, more trying yet, his strongest prejudices.

It may well be that those who have never reaped the enjoyments and benefits just enumerated will remain somewhat sceptical as to their existence, at all events in such a superlative degree; but every one will readily understand that when those terrible days of university reckoning are at hand, that is, on the eve of the final examination, reading men derive a certain malicious pleasure from comparing their feelings with those of the ordinary undergraduate.

It is true that they are even more anxious; failure to them means bitter mortification and the loss of what they have

sacrificed many of the advantages and enjoyments of college life to obtain ; while at Cambridge, at all events, a man can try for a pass or " poll " degree as often as he pleases, but only once for one trip.

But, at all events, the reading man may flatter himself that his anxieties are of a higher kind ; his B.A.—and owing to the crass ignorance of university matters which prevails in the outer world, any B.A. has its value—is certain ; what occupies him is to know, not whether he will pass with the ruck, but where he will be placed among the select few who are certain of high or, at all events, of creditable honours. Vanity to a great extent, no doubt ; but is not the gratification of vanity one of the most pleasant of human vices ? and is not the vice very human in young men who have won their way to a certain position in a small and exclusive little world, but a little world of wide intellectual attainments and singularly fair play ? For—and this is one of the best features of our universities—there every man who enters has his chance of making his mark in something, from lawn tennis to divinity ; and, as a rule, the men who do make their mark are the men who deserve to do so.

It is true that this rule has most exceptions in the place where its maintenance is most important ; that is, in the examination room. It is not that the papers themselves are not fair, since the utmost care and skill are devoted to their preparation ; while some of every body of examiners have, and to some extent are, I believe, guided by their personal knowledge of a candidate's attainments ; but no precautions can exclude the one great element of uncertainty—health, and undoubtedly a number of able men fail to do themselves justice in the final test, because their health, though not actually broken down, cannot support adequately the strain of five days' very hard and very anxious labour, kept up for many hours at high-pressure speed.

I remember seeing one able and hardworking friend so exhausted after a day in the Cambridge Senate House, that he had literally to rest holding on to some railings before, with the help of an arm, he could struggle to his rooms in a neighbouring college.

Still, except in health, in which a very anti-socialistic Nature persists in maintaining the grossest inequality, men do at our universities strive on equal grounds, and with very fair results ; which perhaps is the reason why their contests are fought out

very keenly, but with an almost complete absence of that "envy, hatred and all uncharitableness," of which the same men will show so much in after life.

It is almost unknown that a man should either triumph over a vanquished, or seek to depreciate a successful rival ; indeed, as a rule, the men who compete most keenly with other in the examination room are not only on pleasant terms out of it, but are always ready to assist each other in their work, and exchange hints and wrinkles with a freedom only checked by the proper feeling which restrains a gentleman from taking undue advantage of a dangerous antagonist's generosity ; while very real and generous help is given, without any equivalent, by the leading men in a study to the merest acquaintances of the lecture-room.

I remember, just before the great event, consulting a future first-class man from another college, and to whom I had never before spoken, as to a new book in our subject, which I assumed he had read, and this information was given and accepted by both of us as a simple matter of course.

If one reason for this undergraduate chivalry is the belief that the Alma Mater's favours are won by merit, another is perhaps that when men are very young, and are living in a world of their own contemporaries, they manage to combine an exaggerated estimate of the importance of that world's prizes, with a pleasing habit of drawing heavy cheques on the future.

One very dark reality of undergraduate life is the fact that so often those cheques will be dishonoured.

Though the university is supposed to be a miniature world, success in the one by no means assures success in the other ; partly because of the large influence in the latter of what we call chance, luck, or circumstances ; partly because the prizes are comparatively fewer, and partly because to attain those prizes other qualities are required besides those which win for a worker academic success in his own chosen field.

A reading man at college must only partly accept old Horace's advice, *carpe diem* ; but too often he would save himself very bitter disappointment by always bearing in mind its continuation, *quam minimum credula postero*.

N. M. T.

## A Woman's Heart.

By MRS. ALEXANDER,

Author of "THE WOOLING O'T," "BY WOMAN'S WIT," "A LIFE INTEREST,"  
"A FALSE SCENT," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER XXVII.

#### A CHALLENGE.

OF all the actors in the foregoing scene the one who suffered most was Ferrars.

While Claire and her brother argued, he felt poignantly that the edifice of hope and happiness he had been nursing into life with such long-enduring, patient care, was tottering to its fall like a house of cards.

But Claire had spoken with great firmness ; she seemed to know her own mind. Still, his real rival was the bright little fellow now chattering gaily about his father and "the nice, pretty lady" who was so kind to him.

Once persuade Claire that it was for her son's good, and she would endure the purgatory of returning to life with her husband.

"Pray heaven that idiot de Walden may be egged on by his female Mephistopheles to some blundering assertion of paternal authority, then she will cut herself adrift from him. Then, even then, I must play a waiting game. Will she ever think herself free and unmarried ? How much coherence society owes to the refined superstition of our delicately-minded women."

The next few weeks, he felt, were pregnant with good or evil for him. Meantime, he must wait and show no sign.

He banished these thoughts by a strong effort of will, and, calling a hansom, devoted himself to his little companion, nor did he fail to convey to him a warning not to talk to mother about his adventures that day.

\* \* \* \*

So Gerald was sent to school.

The idea of having plenty of playfellows reconciled him to the

change; the large grounds and cheerful aspect of the place were attractive; finally, the assurance that he should come to "Mother" every Saturday afternoon and remain till Sunday evening, enabled him to part with her with comparative composure.

To her, this first separation, coming so soon after the shock she had sustained, seemed more than she could bear.

Though keeping up bravely till she was out of her son's sight, she broke down utterly as she drove back with her brother, who had remained in town on purpose to accompany her. Even when she had mastered her emotion, and felt satisfied she had done the best she could for her boy, the blank in her life caused by his absence was difficult to fill.

From Lord de Walden there was no sign, and Claire began to hope that she would be molested no more.

Her youth and natural strength began to assert themselves, prompting a wish for some change in the monotony of her life. She even ventured with Lill and Ferrars to the Lyceum, and greatly enjoyed "Much Ado About Nothing." It seemed to draw her out of herself, and to suggest to her that life had other sides brighter and lighter than the deeply-shadowed facet so long turned towards herself.

Some days after, Ferrars found her at Mrs. Stepney's studio, where she sometimes worked and sometimes sat for Lill, having at last consented to fulfil her old promise.

Lady de Walden was in the sitter's chair, but was not yet posed. She was reading aloud a letter, and seemed so much younger, brighter, and more hopeful that Ferrars was exhilarated to look at her. "You are too late to hear this valuable document, Stephen," she said, holding out her hand with a smile. "It is such a nice letter from Gerald. You must read it. Is it not well written?"

Ferrars took and perused the epistle with evident interest, and smiled good-humouredly at the contents. "The young man has some notion of composition," he said; "it is better than his orthography. I am glad to see he is so happy."

"Yes, and you cannot think how well he looked when he came to me last Saturday. I am sorry you did not see him."

"So am I," returned Ferrars drily; "for the Saturday to Monday visit I was obliged to undergo was rather a bore."

"I am surprised to hear you say so," she returned. "Mrs.

Tremaine was with me yesterday, and said the party was most amusing."

"I am glad it pleased her."

"You will be surprised to hear that the general and myself have promised to dine with her on Saturday week."

"No, I am not surprised; I had an invitation this morning in which Mrs. Tremaine mentions the fact. I was very glad to hear it. Now your difficulty will be to avoid too many engagements."

"I don't think so, Stephen."

"Well, Miss Sandys; how are you getting on?" as Lill came from some corner, where she had been collecting her materials with her box of pastels.

"Not quite to my own satisfaction," she returned. "Come and look."

An animated discussion ensued, and though Ferrars was hard to please, he was, on the whole, fairly content.

"This style of thing, pastels, exactly suit Lady de Walden," he said meditatively. "There is a delicacy and softness in the colouring that reproduce her own."

"Exactly," put in Mrs. Stepney, who had joined the group, palette in hand.

Lill now placed her sitter in position, so Ferrars retired to the other side of the studio to look at Mrs. Stepney's work and talk to her in a low voice.

After a few words respecting the subject of her picture, Ferrars said: "Do you know that I was honoured by a visit from your landlady some time back?"

"I do indeed. I am partly accountable for it. I never saw a poor woman in such distress. She was determined to explain and apologize to some one, so I thought it wise to divert her from Lady de Walden to you."

"I am infinitely obliged to you. We had a trying scene, I assure you. She wept quarts, nay, barrels full of tears, and declared that erring relative of hers had broken her heart. I believe she did, *pro tem*. She is, I believe, an honest creature; but I imagine her heart has immense recuperative powers. It was a curious chance that sent you to lodge in her house."

"These strange chances are of more frequent occurrence than is generally suspected," said Mrs. Stepney thoughtfully. "I have seen many, so many that I am sometimes inclined to think

certain groups of persons are invisibly linked together and that at intervals they are bound to come in contact and influence each other."

"I am half inclined to agree with you," and Ferrars smiled grimly as he thought, "If the Repton hadn't flown at higher game she might, I suspect, have been Claire's sister-in-law. Granard was pretty far gone, poor beggar. That trick of the devil must cost him a large amount of penance. I wonder if he wears a hair shirt or flagellates himself?" But Mrs. Stepney was saying:

"Now, was it not very strange that *you* should have called on that—woman, at Mrs. Holden's?"

"Yes, in a way. Then, you must remember, at that time we all felt so honoured by Mrs. Repton's acquaintance, that a sort of connection was kept up involuntarily with the same house."

"It has not been an unlucky house to us," said Mrs. Stepney pensively.

"You are superstitious?"

"Every one is. I will never believe there is a soul free from it. Of course, there are people who have no souls; I don't count them. Superstition is our tribute to the unknown. By-and-by, I suppose, nothing will be unknown. I earnestly hope I shall be under the sod when that terribly enlightened period arrives."

"I think I agree with you," said Ferrars. "As I suppose the sitting will last some time longer," he continued, "I will take myself and my cigar for a stroll."

"I think it will be soon over. Lady de Walden was resting when you came in. She had been here some time; and as for a cigar, it is quite natural to smoke in a studio. Stay here and read the *Daily News*."

It was not long before Lady de Walden put on her bonnet and cloak and, after an appointment for the following day and a cheerful interchange of adieux, she left with Ferrars.

"She certainly has talent—the little one," said Ferrars; "she has improved, too, and has caught your expression, which just now is more like what it used to be."

"I am very glad you think well of Lill's work. She is a dear little thing."

"I don't fancy she is quite so bright as she used to be. I



wonder what she has done with that good-looking young backwoodsman who used to hang about the studio last year."

"You mean Mr. Norris? I saw him there last Saturday afternoon. Do you imagine——?" she paused.

"Yes, I do," returned Ferrars, smiling as he answered her unspoken thought. "I think the backwoodsman is a *prétendant*."

"They seem rather stiff and cold to each other."

"That does not count," said Ferrars with decision.

"Really, Stephen, you speak as if you had had immense experience." He did not reply, and they walked on in silence for a few yards, then Claire said suddenly, "The idea of going to this dinner at Mrs. Tremaine's makes me quite nervous. You will laugh when I tell you that it seems a most formidable undertaking."

"No, I shall not laugh. It is a natural feeling enough, after your long seclusion."

"Nevertheless it will be a tremendous effort; but I will brave it."

"It will be your first and *last* effort then; the first step in this direction is half of the road."

Then Ferrars returned Gerald's letter, observing, "He is growing a sharp little fellow. I look forward to his future with great expectations."

"Poor dear child! If he turns out a true-hearted conscientious gentleman I shall be quite content," said his mother with a quick sigh, and the congenial topic occupied them till they reached Palace Mansions.

Mrs. Stepney and Lill worked on for some minutes in silence after their visitors had gone. Then the latter exclaimed: "There! I will not touch it any more. I am always wanting to touch and touch till I destroy the likeness. I cannot quite catch the charm of her face, though she is not beautiful."

"Yes, put it away, and try to forget it till to-morrow. I think the imagination is like an engraver's plate—if you constantly use it on one subject the print grows blurred. Try and get a fresh 'proof before letters' each day."

"You are a very clever woman," said Lill slowly, with an air of complete conviction, as she put away her precious pastels with care.

"Thank you. Have you only just discovered it?"

"I have always thought so ; but as I grow less of an idiot myself I perceive it more. You have ideas, and you can express them. It is a great thing to have read and studied, and to be able to remember. I never remember things."

"Yes, Lill, when you pay attention you remember ; but you dream away half your life."

"Perhaps I do."

What further confession might have followed Mrs. Stepney never heard, for the hysterical bell jingled imperiously, and she went to the door, admitting Mr. Norris.

"Come in. Very glad to see you. What brings you here at this time of day ?"

"A lucky chance," said Dick Norris, with a bright smile, as he took off his hat, and then greeted Lill. "I was sent up on business to Mr. Dalton, who is staying at a private hotel near Cromwell Road. He used to put up in Dover Street."

"Indeed !" cried Mrs. Stepney. "I have not seen him for a long time."

"He has been to and fro a good deal of late, and seems now rather in a hurry to get his yacht ready for a long voyage ; at all events he settled my business pretty sharp, so I had time to look in here. It was about some investments in a new Australian railway. Everything that man touches turns to gold. If I were he I'd offer a cock to Esculapius, or whatever the old Greek chaps used to do to propitiate fortune."

"Yet he doesn't seem to me a happy man," said his sister.

"Very likely not. How can a homeless man be happy ?"

"An *unhappy* home would make him far more miserable," murmured Lill.

"Yes——" began Dick eagerly, when Mrs. Stepney broke in, "Now, I will not have any more of your arguments. You never meet without a quarrel, and all the time you dispute over different sides of the same shield."

"Very well," said Norris good-humouredly. "May I look at your portrait of Lady de Walden ?"

Lill placed it on the easel.

"It's the image of her," cried Norris enthusiastically. "Just the turn of the head and the sweet noble look. How could that husband of hers leave her ?"

"Men are a bad lot," remarked Lill.

"Well, there is a tolerable sprinkling of bad lots among the women," cried Dick.

"Please remember you are both bound over to keep the peace," interposed Mrs. Stepney.

Dick bowed and laughed. "The face, you know, is not comparable in regular beauty to that 'stunner' I saw talking to your brother in Regent Street—I told you at the time"—Mrs. Stepney nodded—"but the superiority here is amazing."

He paused, contemplating the picture. "You'll be an R.A. one of these days, Miss Sandys, when women get their rights."

Lill shook her head. "I shall never be anything—only a dauber. If you only knew how disgusted I feel with everything!"

"I can't bear to hear you say that," exclaimed Norris warmly, "when every one can see you have plenty of genius. Why don't you enjoy your own gifts? I wonder you are not proud of yourself."

"Oh, I shall be all right to-morrow, and I want Mrs. Stepney to give a dance in the studio. I want to dance with that American artist, who has an alphabet of initials before his name. Mr. Vander something. He dances divinely."

To this Norris turned a deaf ear, and renewed his contemplation of Lady de Walden's portrait.

"It is rather curious," he remarked, turning to Mrs. Stepney, "the same handsome woman was waiting in a cab at the door of the hotel just now, as I came out. I can't help fancying that your brother has some matrimonial scheme in his mind, and if she is the object of his choice I must say he has good taste."

"What you say is possible," returned Mrs. Stepney, "and I hope he will choose well and wisely; but I have been 'warned off the premises' as regards his future wife."

"I am sure Mr. Dalton has my best wishes," said Dick. "He did me a good turn. In spite of his abrupt ways and strictness about business, I believe he has a kind heart."

"And a remarkably headstrong disposition," added Mrs. Stepney. "He will go through fire and water to obtain his ends."

"Poor Mr. Dalton! Do leave him alone, and let us plan the party. Of course you will come and help us, Mr. Norris."

"Yes, with pleasure; but at present, time is up, and I must go."

"Take a biscuit and a glass of sherry first," cried Mrs. Stepney, opening a picturesque corner cupboard and taking out those refreshments. "Here, drink that to my brother's health and success. Though he is cold exteriorly, he has been substantially kind to me."

\* \* \* \* \*

The rapidly-lengthening days were most welcome, not only to our artists, but to Lady de Walden.

The first breathings of early spring have in them a renewal of hope, especially to those who are themselves still in the spring-time of life. The recuperative power of youth is enormous. So much of the road still lies before us at the outset, we half unconsciously reason that if our path painfully climbs rugged heights, so it may gently descend into smiling fertile plains, and believe that the most acute forbidding angles may but serve to hide the sunny, flowery nooks which lurk behind them. Claire was too young to look back always, and now that the husband of her early days had so deliberately divested himself of the charm, the nobility, the tenderness with which her love and imagination had clothed him, the poignancy of her grief had evaporated, the wound had closed, though leaving a cruel scar.

It had been a soft grey day, balmy but not sunny. Claire had spent the afternoon in driving with Mrs. Tremaine, and introducing her to Lill and Mrs. Stepney's studio, where they had passed a pleasant half-hour. Since the ordeal of "dining out," which Claire had found much less trying and more agreeable than she expected, she had gained in courage, and was no longer disposed to shun society. It was reviving to find fresh subjects of thought, of interest in the conversation of intelligent acquaintances, whose minds, unlike those with whom she had associated exclusively for more than two years, were full of other things rather than her own woeful story.

Lady de Walden was very pleased to perceive that Mrs. Tremaine had been interested in the studio, and in Lill, and had even tried to buy a small picture on which the latter was engaged. It had, however, been bespoken. Mrs. Tremaine therefore suggested that the young artist should paint something of the same kind and size, arranging to call again and discuss the matter more fully.

On leaving the studio Mrs. Tremaine proposed driving round

the Serpentine, in order to enjoy the sweet soft day to the last. Returning towards Kensington, and near the Albert Memorial, a gentleman on foot raised his hat.

"It is Mr. Ferrars," said Mrs. Tremaine, and ordered her coachman to stop.

After an interchange of greetings, and a few words respecting Lill's pictures, Ferrars remarked, "I am on my way to see General Granard."

"I will walk with you then," exclaimed Claire. "I fear Mrs. Tremaine is already late for her evening engagements."

"That is really of no consequence, Lady de Walden."

"I shall feel easier in my mind if I set you free now," said Claire.

Ferrars assisted her to alight with alacrity.

"Do think seriously of my mother's invitation," were Mrs. Tremaine's parting words. "We might have a 'very good time' together, as the Americans say."

They shook hands, and the bright widow drove away.

"You seem a new creature, Claire," said Ferrars, as they struck into one of the paths which lead across Kensington Gardens to the old palace, in order to reach the gate nearest the general's abode. He looked down into her eyes with a kindly smile.

"I am," she said thoughtfully. "Do you know I feel half frightened to find myself still capable of something like enjoyment, of forgetting for half-an-hour now and then, my own miserable story; but I dare not venture to be light-hearted, not for many a long day; when I forget for a little while a dreadful kind of terror comes to me, a conviction that I have not sounded the lowest depths of trouble yet. I feel it now, though I have had quite a happy day."

"What! an *esprit fort* like you confess to superstitious fears," cried Ferrars smiling, though her words touched him. "My dear cousin, the shadows which have hung over you so long want a large amount of sunshine to chase them all away; a few must linger, but the light will break through and disperse them soon. Do not look at these clouds, they are not on your horizon, they are drifting away into the past."

"Perhaps! I hope so."

They walked on for some paces in silence; then Claire said: "My father seems remarkably well now. It cheers him so much

to go to the club ; he was just starting to pay his diurnal visit when Mrs. Tremaine called for me."

"Yes ; he seems to have taken a new lease of his life. By the way, may I, without seeming idly curious, ask to what invitation Mrs. Tremaine alluded ?"

"How punctilious you are, Stephen ; as if I should ever mistake your interest for idle curiosity. Lady Elizabeth came to luncheon to-day, and invited me to spend a week at Easter at Devereux Court. She begged me to bring Gerald, for she has two or three grandchildren under her care—her eldest daughter is married to an Indian officer, you know. There will be no party—only Mrs. Tremaine and a couple of cousins. I should like to go ; it would be so very nice for dear Gerald to be even for a week in a bright, well-ordered school-room instead of loitering about with me at some seaside place."

"Certainly ; go by all means. Lady Elizabeth Devereux is a delightful hostess."

"I will ask my father——"

"You are in no way bound to ask him. I wish, Claire, that you would remember there is a duty due to yourself as well as to your neighbour," interrupted Ferrars a little impatiently. "It will do you and Gerald a world of good to pass a few days at Devereux Court. The Devereux are *sans reproche* ; they might be good friends for the boy."

"Ah ! yes ; it is of the last importance that he should not fall into bad hands. Young men are so impressionable." Talking with the deep interest this subject always commanded, Claire and her companion reached Palace Mansions and were speedily hoisted to the general's quarters.

"Has my father returned ?" asked Claire, as Stubbs opened the door.

"Yes, my lady ; he came in rather early, and Mr. Briggs has only just gone out. He wouldn't use the lift, and preferred walking all the way downstairs."

"Mr. Briggs !" exclaimed Lady de Walden. A startled look of fear darkened her fair face. She turned her eyes to Ferrars with an appealing look as if she would say, "You see !" Then she went quickly across the vestibule towards the drawing-room.

"The general is writing in his own room, my lady."

"A bad sign," thought Ferrars.

"Come with me, Stephen," cried Claire; "I am foolishly afraid."

General Granard was sitting at his writing-table, which was strewn with letters and papers. He had a pen in his hand and was busy writing.

"Oh! Claire, I have been looking for you. Ferrars, I'm thankful you have come in."

"You have some news, dear father," said Claire, pausing beside him. "Mr. Briggs has been with you?"

"He has. Here, read this. De Walden has struck the blow at last." He handed a large blue letter to his daughter as he spoke.

Lady de Walden flushed up and then grew deadly white. For a second or two she kept silent; then, passing the epistle to Ferrars, she said: "Read it for me, Stephen; I cannot."

He obeyed, and read a stiff, formal letter, addressed to General Granard as Lady de Walden's next friend, setting forth in legal phraseology, that the writer's client—Lord de Walden—seeing that his son was now some months past the age at which by law the father was entitled to his guardianship, desired at the ensuing Easter term to place him at school and to take charge of his education, and wished to give Lady de Walden due notice of his intention, that she might in no way be taken by surprise. Moreover, he undertook to permit her all reasonable access to the boy, always provided she made no opposition to the exercise of his—Lord de Walden's—indisputable rights. A speedy answer was requested, and the writer was, General Granard's faithfully, Gould and Fenton.

Lady de Walden listened in profound silence and stillness, and even when Ferrars ceased to read, seemed for a minute immovable. He let the hand which held the letter drop by his side, while his eyes fastened upon her. The general, turning in his chair, looked earnestly at his daughter, feeling it was indeed a crucial moment. At last Lady de Walden opened her lips, which had grown white, and said in low but distinct tones: "He will have it then. He will force me to fight him." She paused, and the hand she had laid on the back of her father's chair tightened its grasp—"Whatever it may cost me, I will never give up Gerald!"

"No; you must not," said Ferrars with much decision.



"It is an infernally audacious challenge, and there is but one way to meet it," cried the general excitedly. "I told Briggs what I believed your decision would be. He was quite of my opinion. So, my dear child, you just make up your mind. Come with me to Briggs to-morrow, and give him instructions to commence a suit for divorce. If we lose no time the case may come on in the sittings after Easter. The sooner you get through the uncomfortable process the better. You will be a free woman and guardian of your son in a few months. I am glad this determination has been forced upon you."

"Hush!" said Ferrars, in a warning tone. "It is too much for her. Courage, Claire," he continued, taking her arm and drawing her to a chair. "Your welfare is almost accomplished."

"Yes," she exclaimed, "I must not fail now. I must be true to myself and to my son."

Ferrars, observing the ghastly pallor of her face, rang for Stubbs, and then ran himself to fetch her a glass of water, which she took gratefully.

Then she rose to her feet. "I will go to my room, dear," she said to the general, "but I shall be quite myself by dinner-time. You will meet us at Mr. Briggs' office to-morrow, Stephen, will you not? Whatever arrangements you may make will suit me," and she left the room.

Having closed the door behind her, Ferrars returned, and leaning his hand on the table opposite the general, looked straight at him, exclaiming, "At last!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A PARTING BLOW.

HAVING made up her mind on the momentous question of suing for a divorce, Lady de Walden showed more pluck and firmness than either her father or Ferrars expected.

The latter, however, saw, from the change back to the pallor of cheek and pained expression of eye, which had for the last few months disappeared, how much her resolution cost her.

She was calm and clear in her communications with her solicitor—which fortunately were short and few. Easter was now near, and Mr. Briggs expected to commence proceedings immediately after that festival.

Lill had by this time finished Lady de Walden's portrait, and the latter was too unhappily pre-occupied to enjoy her visits to the studio.

Mrs. Stepney was keenly alive to the importance of the decision arrived at by their admired friend, but Lill's ideas on the subject were confused; moreover, she was greatly taken up, first, with her preparations for the dance she had persuaded Mrs. Stepney to agree to, and then with its triumphant result.

A woman of Mrs. Stepney's profession has small difficulty in making friends and acquaintances. There is much freemasonry among artists—and a merry-making of any kind is irresistibly attractive to the light-hearted, genial tribe. No need, either, to hire musicians or costly entertainers; among the guests plenty of capable volunteers were found to play well, and with spirit to sing or recite. The hostess in charge took care there should be no lack of refreshments—the only difficulty, indeed, arose from a tendency on the part of the company "not to go home till morning."

Lill enjoyed herself immensely, and even amid her hospitable cares Mrs. Stepney thought she had never seen Norris look so radiant.

"It really was a grand success," said Lill, the day but one after the entertainment, as they finished dinner rather earlier than usual, for Lill was going to a fancy ball with their friends, Mrs. Latour and her daughters; "suppose, dear Mrs. Stepney, we have another dance next month?"

"Certainly not," said that lady decidedly, "one such *corrobory*, as we say in Australia, in a season is enough for our pockets and reputations."

"Your pocket, you mean. I am sure it did not cost me much."

"Never mind. I must take care of you, Lill. When you *do* enjoy anything you are apt to be carried off your feet."

"I am sure Mr. Norris nearly carried me off my feet. He is quite too tall to be my partner; but he dances wonderfully well for a backwoodsman."

"On or off your feet, Lill, you seemed to have danced with him half the evening."

"Oh, no. I was quite discreet—only seven regular dances, two extras and that heavenly 'Thousand and One Night' valse, when Mr. Vandervoort, my real partner, was at supper."

"Hum, ten dances. Well, do what you like except make a fool of him."

"Make a fool of him! Why, he will not let me, and—— It is getting late; as I am to dress at Mrs. Latour's on account of the *coiffeur*, I had better go. I am glad they have asked me to sleep there, too, for I am sure you want two or three good nights to rest you."

"Yes. I shall go to bed early."

When Lill had departed, Mrs. Stepney took up a "society paper," and drew a chair to the fire, feeling too idle to read anything requiring attention. Having settled herself, and rung the bell, she opened her paper and glanced down the paragraphs headed "On dit." Carelessly and sleepily as she looked, her eye was caught by a familiar name: "The latest Australian millionaire, Mr. Gustavus Dalton, whose feats as a crack shot and daring rider have attracted the notice of sportsmen, is at present much engaged preparing his yacht for a long voyage. 'The Siren's' victorious career during the ownership by Mr. S. Ferrars is chronicled in the records of the R.Y.C. *On dit* that Mr. G. Dalton intends to take her a voyage to our antipodes while his new mansion in Park Lane is being painted, decorated, and furnished by the well-known and artistic firm of Brown, Jones and Robinson."

"Gus is certainly making his way," mused Mrs. Stepney. "He was always fond of the sea, and could ride nearly anything, but I never knew that he was a wonderful shot; perhaps golden salve gives keenness to the vision as well as climbing power to the limbs. Oh, Mrs. Holden," as that personage appeared at the door, "don't trouble about the dinner things if Barbara is out."

"I was obliged to send her on an errand, 'm, but she will be back directly, so if you don't mind—— Dear, dear, there's the post; how he does tear at the bell."

Mrs. Holden vanished and speedily returned, looking rather red and distressed. "It's only for me," she said, glancing at a letter she held; and taking up a dish of fruit she put it in the indispensable cheffonier in a nervous way, then coming back to the table she paused, took up the letter and drawing her hand across her eyes, said, "Well, I am a great fool."

"Why do you think so?" asked Mrs. Stepney smiling.

"Because I am afraid to open this."

"I trust it does not contain bad news; but you have some reason for your fear?"

"Well, Mrs. Stepney, if you will excuse me for mentioning the subject—I know the handwriting—it's from that unfortunate, misguided, and I must say bad woman, my niece. I'd send it back only I don't know where she is just now."

"The less you have to do with her the better," observed Mrs. Stepney.

"Ah, that's true; still I must open this, and I am that nervous—maybe you'll excuse me looking at it here?"

Mrs. Stepney gave permission, and Mrs. Holden opened the envelope and looked at the card which it contained. "It's short, at any rate. Now what on earth is she up to? Here's the whole of it, if I may read it. 'Dear Tony,'—that's what she used to call me when she was a beautiful child twenty years ago, and I little thought what she would come to," cried Mrs. Holden, drawing forth her pocket-handkerchief—"Dear Tony, though you have renounced me, do me one more service. If any letters come for me to your house, keep them till I send you stamps and an address; at present I am *nowhere*. Your attached, E. Repton.' There you see, she will not let me go. Now what am I to do? Eh, Mrs. Stepney? What would *you* do, 'm?"

"I scarcely know. Indeed, I should be inclined to let them lie here. If they were returned to the dead-letter office they might create additional scandal."

"That's true, and we have had scandal enough—that's what I thought of myself; but directly I get her address I'll write her a piece of my mind and tell her I will never keep no more letters for her."

"Yes, I would. She really is a very brazen woman."

"Ah! you are right, and I am sure she has nearly broken my heart. To think how well and happy I might be with such permanent lodgers as you and Miss Sandys—regular as clock work, paying to the day; and no sooner did I begin to recover myself a bit and get my head above water, when this unfortunate girl goes all wrong. I am sure it *is* good and kind of you to stay on with me, considering how she behaved, and the trouble she brought on that dear sweet lady"—here Mrs. Holden became much affected and wiped her eyes energetically. "There's the girl," she then exclaimed in an unsteady voice; "I hear the area

gate. I'll send her up to clear away, and I'm glad to have your advice, Mrs. Stepney, and to see you are just of my way of thinking." Pouncing on a few plates, Aunt Tony beat a rapid retreat.

It was some little time before Mrs. Stepney could attend even to the "trifles light as air" which filled the pages of her paper, while she pondered what "move" poor simple Mrs. Holden's objectionable niece was about to make.

"I am almost sorry I counselled her to take in these letters—but I am horribly afraid of some *coup*, which may startle and distress Lady de Walden. I fancy that creature will soon send for her letters, and then Mrs. Holden must resolutely refuse to permit any further communication between them. To think of the many unhappy criminals who have been hanged for hasty, unpremeditated murder, and there is this detestable wretch walking about in 'silk attire,' enjoying every material pleasure, which is all *she* cares for, after deliberately destroying two lives. That wretched Lord de Walden will never be fit for anything again, and what happiness can his sweet young wife have after such a terrible episode? There is very little justice in this world. I have no doubt, as soon as ever the divorce is obtained, that idiot of a man will hasten to make his accomplished mistress 'Baroness de Walden.' Then, as years roll on and the true story is forgotten, she will win a position and die 'highly respected and deeply regretted!' Daring and perseverance with a bad cause will achieve almost everything!"

Mrs. Stepney did not mention this incident to Lill, and indeed it would have passed from her mind had not Mrs. Holden jogged her memory by occasional mysterious whispers when they met in the hall or on the stairs; "there was a letter this morning," or "another this afternoon. Would you believe it? I'll have a pile presently; but not a line from herself."

\* \* \* \* \*

Despite his deep sympathy with Claire, and his sincere anxiety about her at this crisis, Ferrars was startled at the wild delight which made his heart throb, as he thought of the possibilities that might succeed when the trial was over.

Of Claire's ultimate freedom there could be no doubt, for de Walden would not oppose the claim he had driven her to assert. Yet he trembled for the result.

Claire seemed to trust him, to lean upon him more than ever,

but no sister could have been more calmly confidential. God only knew what crotchet of devotion to her son, of belief in the indissolubility of the marriage vow on her own side, might actuate her hereafter when she was legally free.

It was about a week after Lady de Walden had come to the decision last recorded, when Ferrars received a telegram :

"Palace Mansions.

"Try to be with me a little before 2.30. Very anxious to see you."

This was delivered about half-past eleven. Ferrars managed to dispatch whatever he had to do, and be in the neighbourhood of Kensington a few minutes before the appointed hour.

At the door of Palace Mansions he found the general, looking extremely fresh and well got up, and about to step into a hansom.

"Hallo, Ferrars !" cried the ancient warrior pleasantly. "I'm just off—promised to introduce Sir Francis Harrowby to some of the committee. He has only just returned, after a life-time in India. But Claire is at home—rather headachy and nervous this morning. You must cheer her up." And the general stepped into the cab awaiting him with surprising briskness.

Ferrars ascended to the general's quarters and was at once admitted. The pretty, cheerful drawing-room, which had become so delightfully homelike since Claire had pervaded it with her sweet personality, was unoccupied. The fire burned brightly, and an open window prevented the perfume of the hyacinths from being oppressive. A low arm-chair stood beside Claire's work-table, whereon lay some knitting and an open book at which Ferrars glanced, observing it was "*Sonnets from the Portuguese*." The general's chair was pushed back from the fire-place and stood near his reading-table, which was littered with papers and periodicals.

A pastel portrait of Gerald was on an easel, where the light showed it to the best advantage. Ferrars stood a moment gazing at the various familiar objects, and thinking, with a sort of intoxication, that in a few months—perhaps weeks—he would be free to try his chance for the happiness of which he had so long dreamed, for which he had so long and patiently striven.

The opening door roused him, and Claire came in quickly. The first glance at her face showed she was greatly disturbed.

She was pale even to the lips, while her large eyes looked feverishly bright, as if her spirit burned within her.

"I am so glad you were able to come, Stephen," was her greeting. "Did you see my father as you came in?"

"I did; and saw him drive away."

"That is well. I could not have spoken before him." She paused and drew a letter from her pocket. "I have received a most extraordinary communication, written by some enemy of yours. You must read it before we can discuss the contents."

Opening the envelope she took out a folded paper and handed it to Ferrars.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "It is de Walden's writing."

"It is; pray read it."

She sat down as she spoke, in her father's chair, and looked earnestly at Ferrars, who stood near the window, where the light fell fully upon his face.

Very stern and set it grew as he read. The letter was dated the —th of January, two years back, and began:

"DEAR EVA,

"I have just got through my interview with Stephen Ferrars. It was a pretty bad quarter-of-an-hour, I can tell you, and I should not care to face it again. You can fancy all his priggish airs, which seemed the more unbearable because I know I have behaved awfully bad. But the thought of you, my darling, and the welcome back that awaited me, helped me to face it. Of course, he went over the old lines—what was due to my name and position, to my son, to society, and above all to my wife, who was a great deal too good for me. That is true enough. If she had been a shade less perfect I might have found *you* less irresistible. I think in his heart Stephen felt this, for there was something cold and constrained in his exhortations that I should return to my home, and I saw he could not deny that Lady de Walden's extraordinary self-control and absence of curiosity as to the cause of my altered manner (which I know she observed) was hardly compatible with the ardent love so indispensable to my existence, and which I have found in *you*. Altogether, Stephen was not so enthusiastic a champion as I expected. His contempt for myself was evident enough—but did not break my heart. Of you I would not let him speak.



Finally, I told him Lady de Walden had her remedy in the relief our laws could give. A spotless woman divorcing a scamp of a husband is in an excellent position. He assured me sternly this was a step Lady de Walden would probably never take. Time will show. If she does, my darling, you will find how gladly I shall prove my sense of your disinterested devotion ; nor shall we be the less happy in our love because we have given up the world for each other. I hoped to tell you all this to-morrow morning, but I find Gould has come over here with some papers, &c., respecting which I want to settle with him before we start away south, so I cannot reach Brussels before the day after to-morrow. Till then, good-bye.

"Yours fondly, devotedly,

"DE WALDEN."

Ferrars looked straight into Claire's eyes and asked in a clear, collected tone, "Do you believe this account of my most painful interview with your husband?"

"No," she replied very deliberately. "I could not—I dare not believe anything that would make me doubt *your* loyalty. Now read this inclosure," handing it to him. "It is much worse."

"This writing is not quite strange," said Ferrars ; "but I do not know whose it is."

"I too seem to have seen it." Then silence ensued while Ferrars with knitted brows read as follows :

"A sincere well-wisher to Lady de Walden ventures to send her the inclosed letter, hoping it may enable her to see the truth and unveil the designs of her devoted friend, the key to whose halting advocacy of her cause with Lord de Walden may be thus discovered.

"From the beginning of the unfortunate estrangement between Lady de Walden and her husband, the writer of these lines could not help observing and understanding the strategic course adopted by Mr. Stephen Ferrars. From the first he perceived the possibilities involved in the state of affairs, and the chance afforded him for the advance of the suit which, but for the fact of her being a wife, he would before have pressed upon her, for none can doubt the profound and ardent, if perhaps hopeless, attachment entertained for Lady de Walden by her husband's kinsman.

How far the force of this passion excuses his failure in loyalty both to husband and wife, it is for Lady de Walden to judge—if calm judgment is still in her power. At all events the writer feels it is a duty to lay the true state of the case before her, lest she should trust her future to one whose sense of honour has proved less keen than his perception of *her* fascinations."

When Ferrars had come to the end of this elaborate composition, he crushed it in his hand and stood in deep and gloomy thought.

"It is infamous, is it not?" cried Claire indignantly. "What enemy *can* you have, Stephen? Who could so traduce you?"

He gave her back the letter in silence and began to pace the room.

"It is that woman!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "I remember the writing now—she has had an old grudge against me."

"And does she suppose that I would believe the word of an anonymous calumniator, against the experience of your true disinterested friendship?" Ferrars paused in his old place by the window opposite her. "To accuse you of any personal feeling when——" She stopped, raising her eyes to his; something she read there sent a thrill almost of terror through her veins. "It is not true, Stephen," she said. "Say it is not true."

In her agitation she rose to her feet. There was a moment's silence, then Ferrars, grasping the top of a high chair near him, asked in a low voice, "What do you think yourself, Claire?"

"I believe you to be the truest of friends, more than a brother."

"Much more than a brother," he exclaimed. "I dare not be false. I love you with all my soul, with all my strength. When I told you how passionately I loved one whose name I would not speak, it was a parable, invented to mask an avowal which relieved my heart without offending you. But, on my honour, I did my best to save your husband; I *believe* I did my best. How far I was influenced by hopelessness as regarded him, for he was past saving, by the perhaps selfish longing to set you free, I cannot judge. I did my best to be loyal. I would never have ventured to obtrude my hopes, my feelings on you, at least not for many a day; but this base attack has torn away the veil, and I *must* speak the truth. Do not resent it, Claire."

Claire made no answer ; she dropped into a seat, and covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

"I am not angry," she sobbed, "only amazed, distracted. Oh, how could you, how could any man think of a woman so sorely tried, so unfortunate, save as a *mater dolorosa*, to be compassionated, to be helped, but raised by misfortune above all earthly passion?"

"Your sorrow only helps to endear you. Claire, forget that I have spoken ; remember that I am at your disposal ; I will be whatever you command. Forget that I have confessed myself ; I will be your friend, your brother—anything—everything save your lover, until—until time has healed your wounds and permitted beneficent youth an aftergrowth."

"Alas ! alas !" cried Claire wringing her hands, "we can never be the same again. Yet how can I live without you ? To whom can I turn ? Whom can I trust ? I wish—I wish I could have remained ignorant. It seems so dreadful that I—that you should have thought of me as a free woman. Oh, Stephen, I can never believe again."

"Love or believe again as you will," cried Ferrars ; "I only ask to be your friend, your helper, in this troubled time. I want nothing ; only do not banish me from your presence ; I can be of use to you."

"It can never be the same again ; yet I cannot do without you, Stephen ; I am so dependent upon you, and I *am* so miserable." And covering her face with her hands she wept bitterly.

Ferrars was at his wits' end. A more unfortunate blow could not have been levelled at the tottering edifice of hope he had been so cautiously rearing. He paced to and fro, scarce daring to speak, not knowing what words to use.

"For God's sake, Claire," he exclaimed at last, "tell me you are not angry or offended. I respect your ideas, your opinions, however unnecessarily severe I may think them ; but I could no more help loving you than I could avoid drawing the breath by which I live—and I have cared to live *only* for you. Still I can be and seem only a friend—a brother—rather than offend you. It drives me mad to think that I have added to your sorrow ; why are you so distressed ? Why are you so angry ?"

"I don't think I am angry, only shocked and frightened, and

broken-hearted to think I have lost you, so good a friend to Gerald, too."

"Why should you lose me?" cried Ferrars, pausing before her. "Are you going to banish me because of some overstrained crotchet respecting your unfortunate position? Morally you are free already; in a few months, perhaps less, you will be free legally."

"I cannot reason, Stephen; I am only conscious of a strange painful sense of shame. Why, oh, why did you let yourself love me?"

"My God! how could I help it, Claire? But I will not permit myself to speak to you of the profound affection I have given you. Try to forget this unfortunate betrayal of my secret; I will offend no more; but if you ever had any regard for me, do not rob me of the only object for which I care to live, to do you—well, say, a brother's service; do not send me away."

"I dread making you unhappy, yet—yet I cannot bear to part with you. You will be my friend, dear Stephen? Ah! how selfish I am."

"I will be whatever you choose," said Ferrars in a low deep tone, so expressive of complete devotion that Claire looked up to thank him, and then shrank away from the sad, passionate tenderness of his eyes.

Could this agitated man, pleading as if for life, be the cold, taciturn, cynical Ferrars, of whom she was once half afraid? Amazement, emotion made her almost dizzy.

"You are too good to me," she said falteringly, "and I am acting selfishly, I fear; but for the present, we will just be friends, and—time, perhaps, will bring a different mood to you."

"Perhaps," murmured Ferrars.

"What ought I to do with these dreadful letters?" continued Claire.

"Destroy them," said Ferrars. "Let us make sure that they are safe from any eyes save our own; give them to me."

Lady de Walden obeyed, and Ferrars thrust them into the fire, holding them down with the tongs till they were safely consumed.

"Try to forget your eyes were ever insulted by the malignant lines; time will help you. Now, Claire, I will leave you; nor shall I return unless you send for me, or that there is some

necessity for troubling you. I have an appointment with Briggs for to-morrow, when I hope to find that he has sent formal notice of hostilities to de Walden's solicitors; they shall inform the general."

He held out his hand; she at once put hers into it.

"How you tremble, Claire; I wish to God you had been spared this. I do not like to leave you alone; shall I send little Miss Sandys to you?"

"Oh, no—no! I am better alone; and you—you are not very unhappy, Stephen?"

"I do not feel exactly in Paradise," said Ferrars with a grim smile; "but you are not to think about me."

"How can I help it? Good-bye. Oh! that the next two or three months were over."

"Amen," he returned, and not trusting himself with another look, he left her.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### SECOND THOUGHTS.

CLAIRE DE WALDEN was infinitely relieved when Ferrars had quite gone.

Leaving word with Stubbs that she had a bad headache and could see no one, she locked herself into her own room and lay down on her sofa to think. It was some time before she could do so with any degree of clearness. The first distinct movement of her mind was to cross-examine herself most rigidly as to her own conduct. Had she by any thoughtlessness or levity encouraged Stephen to love her? Even *her* sensitive conscience answered, "No!" Yet she blushed to think that while her husband was living, she should draw forth a lover's devotion from another man. It was wrong of Ferrars—no doubt, very wrong—but far from being indignant with him, her most vivid impression was that she had caused this kind, loyal, devoted friend pain and sorrow. Why did he wish to be anything more than a friend? As such, she could trust him unboundedly—but in a lover, she could scarcely put any confidence. Could any lover be more impassioned than Lord de Walden? He was even tender and kind for several years—yet at the first touch of temptation he deserted her. "Yes," said some inner voice, "but Ferrars is of

a different calibre. Would de Walden be so unselfishly faithful to lover or friend? His facile, self-indulgent disposition could never have served and watched and waited as Stephen's stronger, nobler nature had." "Yes," replied experience, "but this is the characteristic of friendship—once he were permitted to decline into a lover, would he still be faithful? Is there not some inherent disloyalty in love? Why need she speculate on these things? She had done with love. Stephen must be content with her warmest, deepest regard. If not—how barren and bleak life would be without him. Why, what could she do—what could Gerald do without him?" Looking mentally round her, she was amazed to find how little father, brother, friends, counted—compared with Stephen Ferrars. Then she retraced her life since its terrible break-up at Beaumont Royal, and marvelled at the increasing unobtrusive devotion Ferrars had shown. Last autumn, in Germany, how sweet had been her rambles with him, how soothing their long conversations, as the first breath of returning life and health quivered through her veins after the long death-like oppression of her bitter grief. Now all this calm pleasure, this trusting affection, would melt away in the fiercer glow that Ferrars wished to substitute for their quiet delightful intercourse. It was all too painful to think about. She must for the present let things drift; she would be cautious yet kind, and convince him that anything closer than the tie already existing between them was impossible. "And how awkward it will be to meet him again," was her last thought as she rose to bathe her eyes and dress before her father returned.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day and the next passed without any visit from Ferrars. The third day was Saturday, and an early messenger brought a few lines from him saying that if Claire had no plans respecting Gerald, he, Ferrars, would send down his pony and ride himself to Wimbledon in order to escort the boy to Palace Mansions.

It was a kind and gracious suggestion; arriving with Gerald would enable them to meet so much more comfortably and easily, thought Claire as she hastily traced a few grateful words of acceptance.

The morning seemed very long and she found it difficult to attend either to books or work. The general was in what his

daughter considered obtrusively high spirits. A letter from Lady de Walden's solicitors announced that due notice had been given to her husband of the impending action, which had disturbed and distressed her, while it had the opposite effect on her father.

"I am glad to see those fellows are disposed to press on with vigour, Claire," he said as he took up his paper after breakfast. "The sooner you are through this unpleasant passage the better, and then you can take up your life again. I hope there are many bright days in store for you. The boy will be here to-day, I suppose?"

"Yes, I had a note from Stephen, who is very kindly going to Wimbledon to ride back with him; they will be here to luncheon."

"Capital fellow, Ferrars; don't know a better. His devotion to your cause has been perfectly remarkable. Will you be so kind as to give me my spectacles—ah!—thank you. You must write one or two notes for me, my dear."

The morning went by slowly enough, but before she quite expected them, Gerald and his kind escort arrived.

The boy flew into his mother's arms even more delightedly than ever. He seemed to have grown since the week before. His cheeks were glowing with the effect of air and exercise, and his fine eyes bright with health and the joy of his young existence.

"My darling! How well you look! Have you been good and happy all last week?" cried Claire kissing him tenderly, while her arms still clung round him in a lingering embrace.

"Oh, I have been first-rate every way," returned the boy with entire satisfaction in himself and all around. "And we have had *such* a canter over the common instead of coming straight back to town. Wasn't it good of Cousin Ferrars to send my pony? Oh, how d'y'e do, grandpapa?" running to meet the general, who came into the room at this moment. "There's a boy in my class whose father knows you—Clifford minor—his father came down to see him on Tuesday. He has only just come back from India, and he tipped a lot of the boys, so we bought fireworks and *had such* a flare-up in the playground. When Clifford's father heard my name he asked if I was any relation to General Granard, and so——"

While the boy chattered on Claire was greeting Ferrars with a smile and soft blush, of which she was painfully conscious. "Thank you a thousand times for giving Gerald such pleasure."



"I enjoyed my excursion too, I assure you," he returned with what Claire considered enviable composure, while he shook hands with the most friendly *sang-froid*. "Your son has a capital seat already, but I am afraid he is not the most industrious of young gentlemen."

"That will come, I hope," said Claire looking at her boy with loving eyes.

Luncheon was announced, and during the repast Lady de Walden was very silent. Her son, however, made up for any deficiency on her part. He described many thrilling incidents which had occurred since his last visit, winding up with an unexpected question: "Where are we going, mother, for the Easter holidays?"

"I do not know, dear; I do not think of going anywhere."

"Oh! Bertie Clifford is going to Bournemouth, and he says it is so nice there—and we are great friends—do go to Bournemouth, mother."

"Suppose you come and spend the holidays with *me*, Gerald?" struck in Ferrars. "You shall have your pony and see what the stonemasons and bricklayers are doing, and walk in the woods with the keepers—down at Longhurst Park, I mean, not in Brook Street."

"Have you a house in the country too? Oh, that would be jolly! but you must let mother come too. Mother would not like me to be away all the holiday time—would you, mother?"

"Of course mother can come if she chooses—but she will settle all about it with me. Now, Gerald, would you not like to go and see Mrs. Stepney? you did not see her last week."

"Oh, yes; and perhaps Lill has finished that picture she promised me."

"Then go and see if Mrs. Collins can come with you, and I will come for you in half-an-hour," said Claire, who thought she saw that Ferrars wanted to get rid of the boy.

As soon as he was safe out of the room Ferrars began with some hesitation: "I wanted to speak to the general and yourself about these holidays. I think it is just possible de Walden may make some attempt to gain possession of the boy; of course you would get him finally into your hands, but it would be a bad experience for him."

"A deuced bad one," growled the general.

"Not to be thought of," cried Claire, clasping her hands.

"Then I would advise your keeping him in seclusion for a while; no one will think of his being with me. Suppose you go, as you intended, to Devereux Court; take Gerald with you so far and then send him on to me; it is *en route* to D——. I'll take good care of him; once the law proceedings have begun, de Walden will not meddle with him."

An animated discussion ensued, which ended in a decided inclination on the general's part to take Ferrars' advice. Lady de Walden could not bring herself to believe that her husband would interfere with Gerald, seeing how forbearing he had been on a former occasion, when the boy had been absolutely in his hands. They therefore left the question unsettled, and Ferrars took leave soon after, saying he was engaged for the rest of the day. "Do you want the carriage to-morrow before Gerald returns?" he asked.

"Thank you, no; we shall have a quiet walk together, and be ready to start about seven."

Gerald's visit was a very tranquil one, though he was a good deal disappointed at not finding Lill at the studio. Mrs. Stepney explained that she had a slight cold and was remaining indoors.

Gerald was unusually quiet and immensely interested in "Ivanhoe," part of which his mother read aloud to him, patiently answering his many questions and explaining the difficult parts. Then they took a long walk while most people were in church, and went to afternoon service in Westminster Abbey. General Granard dined with his old friend Sir Francis Harrowby, and Claire had seldom felt Gerald so completely her own as during this peaceful day, and even while she rejoiced in his rapid development, sighed to think how soon he would outgrow her tender care and become a law unto himself.

The evening was closing in, a singularly fine soft evening for early spring, when Mr. Ferrars was announced.

Lady de Walden was already dressed to accompany her son on his return journey to school, and was a little startled when Ferrars came in.

"It is such a splendid evening," he said apologetically, "that I thought both Gerald and yourself would enjoy a drive in the phaeton, so I venture to act Jehu."

"Oh, thank you," she returned, "it will be very pleasant."

While she thought, "I shall have to come back alone with him ; but as I am ready I cannot draw back," so she called Gerald, and directed Stubbs to have tea ready when she came back, with great apparent composure.

They were soon spinning along in Ferrars' high phaeton, Gerald doing bodkin between his mother and his kinsman ; likewise doing most of the talking, and occasionally being allowed to hold the reins.

Before they reached their destination the moon rose, and Ferrars prolonged the journey by a *détour* in the direction of Coombe.

On reaching the school their parting was brief, and Claire noticed, as she generally did with infinite pleasure, that her boy showed no symptoms of reluctance or regret at returning.

"Now, then," said Ferrars, gathering up the reins, "let us see if we cannot get back before the general."

"He rarely is sooner or later than half-past ten," observed Claire. "It is amazing how young he is, and how much he still enjoys society. I am years older."

"I am afraid you are wanting in some of the youth-preserving qualities, Claire ; a less sensitive heart, a tougher conscience, might keep wrinkles and grey hair longer at a distance." Then, after a short pause, he began to speak of Gerald, and the advisability of keeping him out of sight during the few weeks which would intervene between the beginning of the holidays and the opening of Lady de Walden's suit. He spoke with the most unembarrassed, gentle gravity—and during their rapid drive home Lady de Walden did not experience an uncomfortable moment ; the subject of their conversation absorbed her, yet not to the exclusion of gratitude for the deep interest Ferrars took in her boy's welfare. Before they reached Palace Mansions she was quite a convert to his views, and ready to adopt them.

"May I come in for a few minutes ?" he asked as he assisted her to alight. "I have a few words more to say."

"Yes, certainly," she returned with a slight sense of dread—though it was no doubt still of Gerald he wished to speak. So, having dismissed the carriage, he followed her to the drawing-room, where the lamps were lightening and the tea set.

"You will take a cup of tea, Stephen ?"

"No, thank you." He walked to the window and back, while

she removed her bonnet and threw aside her cloak, showing her slight, delicate figure in her favourite dress of grey silk and black lace.

"Shall you never wear colours again, Claire?" he asked with his old brotherly familiarity.

"I do not think I shall," she said, faintly smiling.

"You always remind me of moonlight, veiled with filmy dark clouds, in your grey and black garments."

"The clouds are black enough," she returned.

Ferrars sighed, a short deep sigh, and walking towards the easel which supported Gerald's picture, stood looking at it for a moment. "He certainly has your eyes," he exclaimed. "May the likeness run through his nature; he will be all the better. Now, Claire, let me say a few words, a few straightforward words, to you; don't start and fly from them like a frightened fawn."

"I will listen to anything *you* say, Stephen, except——"

"Except nothing at present," he interrupted gravely. "I cannot help seeing that infernal letter has played havoc with our pleasant friendship, that was the salt of life to me. You are changed; my presence disturbs and distresses you. You would rather not see me for the present, till you can forget, if you can forget, that I dared to love you. Well, dear Claire, I cannot afford to lose your friendship; you shall not be troubled with me. I am going away to-morrow; not far—you must be free from all danger and difficulty before I can go far away—but I shall go down to Longhurst. There is plenty to occupy me there, and, unless you or the general send for me, I shall remain till Gerald has paid me his promised visit. After, I shall be guided by circumstances. I wish to heaven this mischief——"

"Oh, no, do not go, Stephen," cried Claire, starting up and stretching out her hands to him. "I cannot bear you to go. I too will speak candidly; have I not always opened my whole heart to you?" Ferrars caught the hands she held out and held them closely, looking into her eyes as though he would read her soul; she gently withdrew from his grasp. "I am a selfish woman, Stephen; I am startled and distressed, almost offended, that you should love me as a lover loves; yet I cannot let you go. I want your help; I want your presence; I want to hear your voice; I am utterly desolate without you. You understand all I feel, all I wish; my son looks to you, as he looks to no one else;

do not desert us. You see how mean I am. I can ask everything from you, and yet will give you—nothing. How is it you do not despise me?”

Ferrars smiled, one of his rare, tender smiles, that made his harsh face for a moment wonderfully soft.

“Because I understand you, Claire, better than you do yourself. Yes, you are right to tell me explicitly what you wish. I am yours. I will go or stay, as you choose. Put all uneasiness out of your mind. Until you are a perfectly free woman, until you have perfectly recovered the bewildering effect of—of the trial that is before you, neither look nor word of mine shall remind you that I love you—oh, my God! how dearly.” He paused abruptly, warned by the startled expression of fear in her eyes. “Forgive me,” he resumed. “I will not again offend; I will be silent, but—not always, Claire.”

“You are always good and—and unselfish, Stephen. I dread misleading you,” murmured Claire.

“Then I am not to absent myself?” said Ferrars with a grave smile; “but I must ask for twenty-four hours’ leave first, to see how my improvements and additions are going on. I shall be in town again on Tuesday evening—will that do?”

“You are mocking, Stephen,” cried Claire, half vexed, yet smiling too. “I only meant that I did not want you to stay away long. You know I want your help with my father—with Willie—with the lawyers.”

“Very well; I shall be a fixture in Brook Street until you pass sentence.” There was a short pause, during which Claire felt exceedingly uneasy and half frightened at the sort of tacit agreement between Ferrars and herself, though this disturbance was not all pain. Then Ferrars began to speak of Mrs. Tremaine and some people he had met at her house the night before. How wonderfully he kept himself in hand; she was half afraid of a man who could so master his own feelings.

The general, who returned a little earlier than usual, put an end to the *tête-à-tête*, and after exchanging a few words with the veteran, Ferrars said good-night. As he walked towards home with a quick elastic tread, “his bosom’s lord sat lightly on his throne.” Yes; he understood Claire better than she did herself; that infernal letter had done him no great harm. She was startled, shocked; but beneath her shrinking was tenderness for and un-

bounded trust in him. He could wait patiently. The day was not so far off when she would listen to his avowal without remonstrance and, with the delicious frankness which was part of her nature, confess that love for him had grown unconsciously in her heart ; no longer shrinking from his caresses, she would give him kiss for kiss, with those sweet sad lips for which he had so often longed, and which now began to seem almost within his reach.

\* \* \* \* \*

This Sabbath was a somewhat eventful day to more than one of the personages who appear in the pages of this sad history.

It was company day at the studio, where Mrs. Stepney's and Lill's friends and acquaintances were pretty constant in their attendance. Lill, though still unwell with her cold, and in a state of deep depression, not to say with the air of a martyr, came to support her chief in the task of receiving.

Mrs. Stepney was engaged to sup with a young artist who had been lately married, and to whom Mrs. Stepney had shown much kindness in former days in Paris. He was very anxious to secure her acquaintance for his wife, and hitherto Mrs. Stepney had been prevented from accepting their invitations. She therefore felt obliged to go, though Lill declared herself so ill and miserable that she must stay at home. Having prescribed gruel and a foot-bath, Mrs. Stepney went on her way. She found so much to dispute and discuss with her young artist friend, that she took no note of time, and it was nearly eleven when she rang the bell at Raby Villa.

The door was almost immediately opened by Mrs. Holden herself.

"I had no idea it was so late," said Mrs. Stepney apologetically. "I am quite sorry to have kept you up."

"Don't mention it. I have sent the girl to bed. She must be up early, you know ; but it's not altogether for that. There is a spark of fire in your sitting-room. Would you mind me coming in to say a word ?"

"Of course not. I suppose Miss Sandys has gone to bed ?"

"Yes, some time ago. I was glad Mr. Norris came in and kept her company a bit, for she seemed very poorly." They had entered the drawing-room while she spoke, and she turned up the gas and was going to stir the fire, only Mrs. Stepney intervened with, "Please do not ; it is quite warm."

"I've got an awful start this evening," began Aunt Tony nervously, "and I thought I'd like to ask you what you thought about it."

"What has happened, Mrs. Holden?"

"Well, you see, I went to hear a revival sermon at the Primitive Methodist Chapel there in Little Randal Street with a very nice woman, Miss Busby; she lives at No. 11. It was that hot and stuffy, not to say very affecting, I was quite glad to turn into her house and take a bit of supper and a glass of beer, so I did not get back home till after nine. Barbara came running to meet me as soon as she heard the latch-key in the door. 'Lor', 'm,' says she, 'I *am* glad you have come; I have had such a fright.'

"'Why, what's the matter, you silly?'" says I. With that she tells me how she was writing a letter in the kitchen about eight o'clock, when a hansom drove up as if the horse would jump over the railings, and the bell rang as if it would never stop. She ran up as fast as she could to the front door, and there stood a tall gentleman, a grand-looking man she says, and the minute she opened the door, he says very determined and commanding, 'I want to see Mrs. Holden,' and walked straight into the hall.

"'She's out, sir,' said the girl, who was half afraid he was a burglar.

"'When will she return?'" he says, glaring at her like a wild beast.

"'I can't say, sir,' says she. 'Missis is out for the evening.'

"'For the evening! Is there any one in the house but yourself?'" With that she made sure he was going to murder her. 'There's Miss Sandys in the drawing-room and Mr. Norris is just come in, and if you don't leave the house I'll call him.'

"'Miss who?'" says he, struck-like and not heeding what else she said.

"'Miss Lill Sandys,' says Barbara, keeping a bold face.

"With that he said some bad words, and laid hold of the poor girl's arm—she is sure it is black and blue—and says he, 'Has a tall lady, with dark eyes and hair, been staying here?—a relation of your mistress, Mrs. Repton. Is she here?—or has she been here?'

"'There's been no such a person, sir, near the place since I have been here, more than eleven months. Mrs. Stepney, an



elderly lady, and Miss Sandys and Mr. Norris, them's all our lodgers, and I don't think missis has any relations.'

"With that the gentleman muttered something to himself and went off, ordering the cabman to drive to some hotel; they started almost at a gallop; the stupid thing did not catch the name of the hotel. What do you think of *that*, Mrs. Stepney?"

"It is very strange. Your precious niece must have been getting into hot water, I suppose. What is your idea?"

"Well, I am almost sure it was Lord de Walden. Barbara says he was tall and reddish in complexion; that he looked a very grand gentleman, as if he expected every one to bow down to him. Now my idea is that he and Eva have had a regular quarrel, and she is leading him this dance just to master him more completely. Ay, she will carry out her schemes and be Lady de Walden before the year is out. If ever there was a bad unscrupulous woman, her name is Eva Holden."

"She is your brother's daughter, then?" asked Mrs. Stepney. "You may be right; but I don't suppose that at the beginning of Lady de Walden's suit for a divorce she would quarrel with a lover who has so much in his power; perhaps he has found her faithless?"

"No, not she. She will never be faithless to her interests. I wonder who those letters are from? It is little more than a week since she wrote, asking me to keep them, and I have four."

"Now I think of it," said Mrs. Stepney, "Lord de Walden can scarcely yet have had notice of his wife's intention to sue for a divorce. I cannot imagine any cause for his sudden appearance. I only hope it means no fresh sorrow or insult to that sweet young woman, his wife. She has borne up wonderfully well."

"That she has. I am sure I am glad she rarely comes here, for I am just ashamed to meet her, knowing the shame and sorrow one belonging to me has brought upon her."

"I am sure she never associates you with the source of her misfortunes," said Mrs. Stepney. "And now, as our speculations about this visitation are likely to be fruitless, I think we may as well go to bed."

Before Mrs. Stepney went to her room, she paused at Lill's door; all was silent and the key had been turned. So she made no attempt to enter.

Next morning Lill came down looking very pale, with red,

heavy eyes, and seemed quite unable to swallow more than a cup of tea.

"Why, Lill, the cold seems worse than ever," said Mrs. Stepney kindly, as Lill drew a chair to the fire and sat down disconsolately with her feet on the fender, without book, or paper, or work. The breakfast things had been removed, and Mrs. Stepney had set out her writing materials, intending to clear off a letter or two before she went to the studio.

"My cold is better, but I am a good deal worse myself," said Lill. "I am more miserable than I can say."

"I am sorry to hear it, Lill. Will you not tell me what is the matter?"

"Yes, I want to tell you, but I don't seem to be able."

"Come, out with it, my dear." Mrs. Stepney drew a chair beside her, and Lill, nervously folding and unfolding her pocket-handkerchief, began:

"I was trying to read last night after you went out, when Dick Norris knocked at the door and asked if he might pay me a visit, so I said he might, and after some talk he told me that his people—the firm, you know—had made him a very handsome offer, either to go out to Sydney at a good salary, or to stay in London as a junior partner, and before he decided he wanted to know if—in short, if I would marry him, and then he would choose which ever I liked."

"And what did you say, Lill?" asked Mrs. Stepney sternly.

"I scarcely know, but I believe I said I was very fond of him, and so I am. I didn't think so, but I am."

"And so you ought to be. He is a good fellow. Well, and have you made up your mind to go to Sydney with him?"

"I could not think of such a thing."

"Then has he made up his mind to stay in London with you?"

"He says he will, but it is all in confusion. I told him again that I would not make a good wife—indeed, I should be a very bad one—and he (it was very foolish, you know), but he did say that he would rather be uncomfortable with me than comfortable with any one else; but of course he would not think so if we were married. I felt awfully happy while he was talking to me, and he seemed so happy too; but I have been lying awake all night thinking, and I am frightened when I see what an ignorant,

helpless creature I am. Then I could not give up my painting for any one—not even for Dick Norris.”

“I don’t suppose he would ask you.”

“Well, how could I order dinner, and pay bills, and write things in books, and paint too? Then if I saw Dick looking cross and unhappy—I—I’d die.”

“I think you are going to meet troubles half-way, Lill. You would learn in time.”

“In time! Not time enough to keep Dick at home until he forgot about going to get nice dinners at his club.”

“Club! pooh, nonsense! He does not belong to a club. Seriously, Lill, you do not mean to say you would hesitate to secure your future happiness for such considerations?”

“They are very important considerations, Mrs. Stepney, and I have almost made up my mind to tell Dick—Mr. Norris—when he comes this evening to speak to you, that it is all over, that he had better not think about me.”

“I will not listen to such folly, Lill. You torment yourself for the mere love of torment. Just listen to me.”

“No, dear Mrs. Stepney, just listen to *me*,” interrupted Lill with sudden animation. “There is only one way out of the difficulty. You have no one belonging to you—come and live with us, and show me how to do things. Oh, you would make us so happy.”

“What! be your unsalaried housekeeper?” exclaimed Mrs. Stepney laughing. “You little know what a frightful *impasse* you are getting into. Why, there is no creature so detested as the third in such a party as you propose. Ask Dick what *he* thinks of the proposition.”

“The idea *is* his,” said Lill smiling archly; “but he was afraid you would not like it.”

“So you have discussed the matter?”

“Oh, no, not discussed it, but he said I ought to sound you.”

“I am too fond of you, Lill, to try anything half-so risky; but I will talk the matter over fully and candidly with Dick. In the meantime, child, throw your fears to the wind and let yourself be happy.”

(To be concluded.)